





# **THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING**

By  
J. D. BERESFORD

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THE JERVAISE COMEDY  
AN IMPERFECT MOTHER

# THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

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J. D. BERESFORD

'There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.'

*Ecclesiastes v. 13.*

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# THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

## I

**D**OG'S life, old man, a dog's life; you can't get away from that."

Arthur Woodroffe's voice was quite cheerful as he framed this indictment of the life of a general practitioner in a poor neighbourhood, but his companion frowned and shook his head impatiently.

"You are still re-acting to the pernicious influences of that damnable war," he said. "You're hankering after the intoxication of saving wounded under fire; exciting stunts of that sort; Sbana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus. You've got to learn to be content with Jordan. Risk your life in more homely ways saving the sick in Peckham. Same thing, really; only you don't get orders for it. And of course . . ." he hesitated, pushed up his gold-rimmed spectacles, and stared hard at his friend and paid assistant. "Any way, what is it you're hankering after, my good chap?" he concluded.

Woodroffe looked critically round the little room, and then at Somers glowering down at him from the hearthrug. "More space," he said briefly; "and more . . ." He seemed to jib at the word that was obviously in his mind.

"More beauty," Somers suggested.

"If you like," Woodroffe agreed carelessly.

#### 4 THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

"Something of that sort. I'd like to get about the world a bit, too."

"As medical attendant to a hypochondriac millionaire?"

"Or some job abroad; or . . ."

"What you really want, my lad, is an independent income and lots of leisure," Somers commented.

"You can't say I've ever been a slacker, Bob," Woodroffe said.

"No, but you'd soon pick it up if you had got enough to live on without worrying."

Woodroffe considered that before he replied. "Don't believe I should. Go in for research or something. Hate having nothing to do."

"There's always hunting and golf, and bridge and billiards, and cricket, and so on," Somers said. "Life of a country gentleman. Also, you might marry and beget a family, and go in for politics. Quite a strenuous life it seems, for a lot of 'em."

"Bit of a change wouldn't it, after the life of a panel doctor in Peckham," Woodroffe remarked; "but I don't think it's my style all the same. I'd like to *do* something, something useful. And by the way, old thing, if you're taking on Nellie Mason, I'd advise you to turn in. I saw her this morning, and she's pretty near her time. Rotten job it'll be, too. But I'll take her on if you like. A fat primip like her would be good for my character."

"No, I'll take it," Somers said. "I promised her I would. She thinks you're a bit young. All the same, I'm not going to bed yet. I want to have this out with you. It's interesting, for one thing. I suppose nothing particular has upset you lately, has it? Nothing that's set your mind roving."

"I don't know. Yes. In a way. Had a letter

this morning asking me to spend a week-end with a wealthy sort of connection of mine in Sussex—or Surrey, is it? Hartling's the name of the place."

"Never heard of it, nor of your connection with wealth," Somers said.

"It's a bit distant," Woodroffe explained. "My aunt, my mother's sister that is, married the old man's son. His name's Garvice Kenyon. Ever heard of *him*?"

Somers shook his head.

"It'd be a bit before your time," Woodroffe acknowledged. "The old chap must be about ninety. I've only seen him once. I went there to stay with my mother when I was a kid of about nine or ten. Some idea of keeping up the connection, I suppose. But after my father got that living in Yorkshire, we dropped out. I don't remember much about the place or the people. General impression of grandeur, and so on, that's all. Mighty fine place, I believe."

"How did you pick 'em up again?" Somers asked.

"Well, I haven't picked 'em up again yet," Woodroffe said. "But I sat next to old Beddington at that public dinner you took me to a fortnight ago, and in the course of conversation—the sort of tosh one does talk to your next door neighbour on those occasions—he happened to mention that he was going down to see old Kenyon. So I claimed the connection for the sake of something to say. After that Beddington talked a lot about Kenyon; in fact he told me more than I had ever heard before. And, well, I suppose in much the same sort of way he must have talked to old Kenyon about me, when he was down there. Anyhow, this morning I got a letter from my aunt—forwarded from Holt's—Beddington probably told 'em I'd been in

## 6 THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

the R.A.M.C.—asking me to go down there the week-end after next. She says the old man would be 'very interested to hear some of my war experiences.' Bright old bird, apparently, for ninety. Beddington said he was as fit as a flea, still, but a bit absent-minded."

"And the thought of going down there has unsettled you, has it?" Somers asked.

"Don't know that I am going," Woodroffe said. "My togs are a bit rusty for that kind of show."

"I'd almost forgotten that one felt like that at twenty-eight," commented Somers. "After the war, too. Accept the wisdom of forty-five, my dear boy, and believe me that rusty togs are quite distinguished these days."

"Makes you feel rotten, all the same," Woodroffe thought.

"But you still avoid the real issue," Somers persisted; "why this invitation has unsettled you."

"I don't know," Woodroffe said, settling himself a little deeper in his arm-chair. "I suppose if one analyses it, the thing set me thinking of—of the differences between Kenyon's position and mine. Here I am with no decent clothes, and no money; sweating myself thin over a dirty job like trying to mitigate the sickness of Peckham, while old Kenyon's got more money than he knows what to do with."

"Incipient socialism, this," Somers confided to the wall opposite.

"It isn't," Woodroffe said. "I've no sympathy with the greasy proletariat; not my line at all. It is that the whole thing has just set me wondering how I'm going to get out of it. It's no damned good pretending, my dear Bob, that I wouldn't sooner be lying snug in a clean comfortable bed

than delivering women like Nellie Mason. And, oh! Lord, the accent is on the *clean* all the time."

"You don't mean to imply . . ." Somers began.

"My dear chap, of course I don't," Woodroffe cut in. "My bed here is clean enough for any one, but for about twelve hours of the day I am mixing with dirtiness of every sort and kind, and I had more than my fill of it in the war—lice by the yard and every sort of filth. You blooming base-wallahs never knew your blessings. Well, all I know is that I used to tell myself stories of getting clean, fantasy hot baths in exquisite surroundings, and picture myself going straight from them into brand new clothes and that sort of thing. Instead of which I've dropped straight into this. I know I'm clean all right, Bob, but I can't *feel* clean. You've got to admit now, haven't you, that ours is a dirty job, take it all round?"

Somers put his hand under his coat and scratched his left shoulder vigorously. "Oh! damn," he remarked, after a thoughtful interval.

"I might come back to it, after a couple of years or so," Woodroffe began again apologetically. "But it's becoming almost an obsession with me just now. I expect these psycho-analysis Johnnies would say I was suffering from some suppression or shock or something."

"You've definitely made up your mind to chuck this job, then?" Somers asked.

"I hadn't when we began," Woodroffe replied. "But talking to you about it seems to have cleared my mind. Honestly I'd no idea of chucking it when we started this jaw, and now it seems the only possible thing to do."

"What are you going to live on?" Somers asked.

"I've saved between four and five hundred

pounds," Woodroffe said. "Carry me on for a bit, though I suppose it isn't worth two hundred these days. And then I might have a look round one of the colonies, Canada or New Zealand, or somewhere. It'd be cleaner than Peckham."

Somers sighed, and made a gesture of renunciation. "I'm sorry about this, Arthur," he said; "very sorry—not only because I shall lose you—though that's bad enough, but also, because, well, your attitude disappoints me."

Woodroffe hunched himself in his chair and began to fidget, touching various marks here and there on the hearthrug with the toe of his slipper.

"You've always said we ought to express ourselves," he grumbled, "and here I'm going contrary to my inclinations all the time. I haven't forgotten your yarns on that subject at the hospital eight years ago."

"My dear old chap, that's the very point," Somers replied. "That's what disappoints me. I thought you had something better to express than these calf-like yearnings for change and luxury."

Woodroffe's handsome face had taken on the expression of a sulky schoolboy. He was still intent on tracing some ideal pattern in the design of the hearthrug as he said: "Had nearly five years of it. Over four years in the Army and six months here. Don't see why in the name of God I shouldn't at least get out into some clean, decent country like Canada."

"I shan't try to stop you," Somers replied.

"All the same you're making me feel perfectly rotten about it," Woodroffe said. "Making me feel as if I were a deserter, slinking off and leaving you here. Might just as well say at once that you won't

let me go. Of course I shan't, now I know how you feel about it."

Somers stared hard at the opposite wall, tucked his hands under his short coat-tails, and as he spoke alternately raised himself on his toes, and let himself down on his heels with an effect of emphasising his points.

"I stand reproved, Arthur," he said. "I was wrong—quite wrong. Purely selfish. I've been a bit tired lately and bad-tempered."

"Not you," Woodroffe mumbled.

"I have," Somers insisted. "I'm in a nasty mood to-night."

"I wish you'd let me take Nellie Mason," Woodroffe put in.

"I can't. I promised her, five months ago. Never mind that. We're talking about you. And I want you to go. Yes; I mean it. You ought to go. I'm a short-sighted old fool; much too wrapped up in myself and my own affairs; but now that I've heard the case stated I can see the truth. You'd only stultify and repress yourself by staying here. I know how loyal you are, and I know that at a word from me you'd go on. You mustn't. You'd do harm to yourself and to the practice by denying your impulse. As you reminded me, that's a well-established principle of mine, though I haven't thought much about it for the last five years—there's been too much to do. The point is, however, that you'll do no good to yourself or any one while you're working against the grain. *Fay ce que voudra*. It's possible that you may come a tremendous cropper, and that might do you all the good in the world. But go you must. I wouldn't keep you now if you wanted to stay."

Woodroffe had stopped fidgeting. "But look here, Bob, old man," he said. "As a matter of fact, I can't go yet, not for a month or two."

"You can go to-morrow if you want to," Somers replied. "Bates wants a job and he'd be glad to come."

"Oh! Lord! Bates!" interjected Woodroffe.

"Yes, ohlordbates!" Somers corroborated him. "Dear old wooden-headed, persistent, patient, uninspired Bates. He's just the man I want. The panel patients'll love him, because he'll take so much trouble over 'em. It's true that he'll have to work eighteen hours a day to get through, but he likes that sort of thing. Makes him feel as if he were being some use in the world, poor chap. Oh! yes, I can do with Bates, but God! I'll miss you, Arthur."

"I'm damned if I'll go," Woodroffe announced, getting up. "Everlastingly damned if I will."

"You will, my son, because I won't keep you," Somers said. "But I don't say that I won't ever have you back. That depends, of course, on how you return to me. If you *want* to come back in two, or three, or five years' time; just turn up and say, 'Bob, I think I'd like to take up the old work again! and we'll go into partnership.' You'll be ripe for it. Now you've got to go and find out what you are fit for. You're not just now fit for this job or you wouldn't be feeling as you do about it. I know you'd stay out of friendship for me, but that's no good—no good at all. I'd sooner have ohlordbates trying to be some use in the world."

Woodroffe sat down again and stared rather gloomily at the pattern of the hearthrug. "I feel rather a swine, all the same, Bob," he said.



"You won't in a month's time," Somers assured him.

Woodroffe contemplated that remark for a moment and then smiled rather grimly. "In a way I hope I will," he said, "and in another way I hope I won't. You needn't think it'll be a case of 'out of sight, out of mind,' Bob; but I shouldn't care to live permanently with the thought of myself as being a swine for having left you."

"You're not leaving me, my dear man, I'm sending you away for your own good and that of the practice," Somers returned.

"Comes to the same thing. It means I've failed you."

"It means that you've failed yourself," Somers corrected him. "Now I want you to go out into the world and find out where and why. You'll do it. I shall expect you back sometime."

Woodroffe sighed and got up, but his face had cleared. "I'll come back," he said; "but I'll admit it's a relief to go in a lot of ways. I—good Lord, I want more space," and he stretched out his arms as if to demonstrate how very little space there was in that small room.

Somers nodded. "That's settled," he said. "And I don't know that you could make a better beginning, Arthur, than by accepting that invitation of your rich connections for a week-end."

"Oh! ah! I'd forgotten that," Woodroffe said, looked down at the knees of his trousers, and added with a faint blush: "Might get myself some new togs out of capital? I'm sure to want 'em sooner or later. Only things are such a filthy price just now. They rook you about thirty quid for a dress suit."

"I should certainly get some new togs," Somers advised him. "Treat it as an investment."

"Of course, if you put it like that," Woodroffe said, with a grin.

"I'll take the responsibility of letting you squander your capital," Somers replied gravely.

"Facetious old dog, you!" Woodroffe returned. "Like to pretend I'm still in leading strings, don't you?"

"Lord, you're not ready for leading strings yet," Somers said. "Wait till you're weaned before you try to walk."

Woodroffe thumped him playfully on the chest.

"Oh! go to bed," Somers growled. "I'm going to try and snatch an hour before I'm fetched for Nellie Mason; if I am fetched. Personally, I shouldn't be surprised if it wasn't for another week yet."

"Dog's life, old man, a dog's life," Woodroffe commented as he left the room.

When he had gone Somers threw himself down with a groan into the arm-chair. "I wonder how long it'll be before he comes back?" he thought. "If he'll ever come back?"

In his mind's eye he had a disgustingly clear image of the solemn, earnest face of young Bates.

## II



## II

**A**RTHUR WOODROFFE'S true defence of his action in leaving Peckham did not occur to him until after he had parted with Somers.

In the course of the ten days that had passed since his sudden arrival at a decision, he had fallen into a perfect intoxication of spending. In that time he had spent over two hundred pounds.

And with that expenditure he had broken another habit of thought. His early life had always been overshadowed by the cares and threats of respectable poverty, and when his last financial responsibility had been closed by his mother's death, eighteen months earlier, he had continued to save money, with the prudent thought that he might presently need capital.

But just as he had suddenly and surprisingly realised that there was no compelling reason why he should stay on as Somers' assistant at Peckham, so, also, he had realised when he began his shopping, that he might, if he wished, do the thing in style. He was beginning a new life. He was young and competent, and he had a profession. He would let the future take care of itself.

And here was one of his fantasies coming true; he would have everything new and clean. He remembered his dream of stripping naked and plunging into a deep wide river, a sweet and rapid flood of purifying water; of swimming many miles until he came to a new land where vermin were unknown; and of walking out of the river, cool,

and refreshed, to dress—he had never told any one that—in white silk from head to foot. Nothing but the smoothest silk would do. He had seen that silk in imagination glimmering with the sheen of a fine pearl. He smiled now at the extravagance of that fancy, but the temptation to buy an entirely new outfit was too strong to be resisted. He had deserved it. The impulse marked his real recovery from the effects of the war.

The world owed him five years of youth! That was the true defence of his action in leaving Peckham. He saw his justification with astounding clearness as he stood on Westminster Bridge looking up the river, half an hour before his train was timed to leave Charing Cross—the train that was to take him to Hartling for his promised week-end. In a re-action against his orgie of spending, he had come as far as that by tram, lugging his new kit-bag and dressing-case. The tram would have taken him on to Charing Cross, but when it had stopped close to his old hospital, he had felt an urgent desire to see the river from the old standpoint. The thought of his bags had not deterred him. He was bursting with vigour and energy that morning.

Society, the World, Life owed him five years for those he had given. The years from twenty-two to twenty-seven. He had joined up in August, 1914, had been sent down to Salisbury Plain for his training, and had been in France by the summer of next year. He had been lucky in some ways. He had not been wounded or gassed or suffered from shell-shock, and in the following winter he had been combed out and sent back to the hospital for two years to finish his training, before returning to France as a Lieutenant in the R.A.M.C. But

looking back now, it seemed to him that he had had no relaxation in all that time. He had taken the war too seriously and the shadow of it had lain over him. If it had not been for that, he would not have joined dear old Bob Somers on the very day that he had been demobilised. He had got the habit of being strenuous and self-sacrificing and all the rest of it, and the habit, or whatever it was, had apparently dropped from him almost miraculously in the course of that conversation. It was unquestionably gone. He felt himself, unexpectedly and delightfully, not only free but also young again. He must write to Bob and explain that theory of the lost years of youth and the world's debit account. He would not be hard on his debtor. He would not exact a full repayment of the original loan. He would take only two years. After that he would go back to the strenuous habit of self-sacrifice and leave his youth behind.

He could recover the very spirit of it in this place. How often he had glanced down from the end of a ward and taken back to his work a picture of the river, of the bridge, or of the Gothic dignities of the Houses of Parliament. In retrospect those pictures were all coloured with the vivid emotions of youth. He could place some of them with the distinctness of a clearly remembered dream. There was, for instance, that wonderful morning in February, mild and clear as a day in April, associated with the thought that he was playing for his hospital in one of the "Rugger" cup ties that afternoon. Great days, those were; and in effect, he was physically little older now than he was then. He was splendidly fit.

He laid hold again of his two bags, and strode triumphantly across the bridge.

And that mood held, even mounted, unchecked by the deliberations of the South-Eastern and Chatham train service. Indeed, the semi-torpid movements of the railway servants on the branch line to which he changed at the junction afforded a pleasant contrast to his own exuberance. He was beginning life again. Everything was coming right. He had visions of some delightful, improbable enlargement of his condition. Old Kenyon might take a fancy to him. Some one in the house, some special favourite of the old man's, might be taken seriously ill, and Arthur Woodroffe, the brilliant young general practitioner from Peckham, would work a miracle at the eleventh hour. Old Mr Kenyon's gratitude would take a practical form, and the thing was done. There were other variants of the dream, but this seemed to be the most promising.

A car was waiting for him at Hartling Station, but neither his aunt nor any of his connections by marriage had come to meet him. Arthur had his bags put into the tonneau and sat in front. He wanted to talk to some one, and found the chauffeur quite willing for conversation. They began with the obvious subject of motors and presently the chauffeur volunteered the statement that the Vauxhall in which they were riding was not their best car.

"Use this for station work and short trips mostly, sir," he said. "But Mr Kenyon always has the Rolls-Royce for going up to town. Never goes any other way. Wonderful old gentleman, Mr Kenyon, sir."

"I haven't seen him for twenty years," Arthur said. "He's getting on for ninety, isn't he?"

"Ninety-one last October, sir," the chauffeur told him, "and he'd make a good seventy in a manner of speaking. A bit absent-minded sometimes, he don't



always hear you when you speak to him; but no doubt that's because he's thinking o' something else. He's not what you call deaf, not in the least."

"Good Lord. Wonderful!" Arthur commented. His mind was engaged in framing a tentative essay on the causes of disability in old age, more particularly with reference to arterio-sclerosis, but he reserved that as being a shade too technical. "Though there's no real reason, you know," he said, "why we shouldn't live to be a hundred or even a hundred and twenty. There's a fellow in Asia Minor who is supposed to be a hundred and fifty."

"I suppose not, sir," the chauffeur replied without enthusiasm, and added, apparently as an after-thought, "You're a doctor, I was told, sir."

Arthur nodded. "I haven't come down here professionally, though," he said.

"No, sir; I shouldn't say as Mr Kenyon had much faith in doctors . . ." The chauffeur's sentence tailed off on a high note, with an effect of there being more to come; also he reduced the pace of the car as if he had something of importance to add before they reached the house.

"I've wondered sometimes, sir," he continued, after a short pause, "whether he oughtn't to—to take advice, as they say. Them fits of absent-mindedness I was telling you about, for instance, come on very queer sometimes. It's like as if he was sound asleep with his eyes wide open. Scared me once or twice he has. I thought perhaps being a doctor you might be able to say if it was anything serious. Of course, being ninety-one . . ."

Arthur would have liked to give a ready diagnosis of this abnormal condition, but his expertise was not equal to the task, and he fell back on the usual defence of his profession.

"Couldn't possibly say without examining him," he said. "It might be due to one of several conditions."

The car running down a slight incline with a free engine had almost stopped. The chauffeur appeared to be deep in thought.

"At Mr Kenyon's age . . ." he began tentatively

"One would not expect him to be quite the man he was at twenty-eight," Arthur supplied.

"Exactly, sir, one wouldn't," the chauffeur replied in the tone of one aroused to a consciousness of his immediate duties; and he let in the clutch and speeded up the car with an effect of turning his attention to more pressing affairs.

For the last quarter of a mile they had been running alongside a high brick wall, and as they now swerved in between a pair of wide-open iron gates, Arthur realised that the rather ugly wall was the boundary of Mr Kenyon's property.

The contrast between the outside and the inside was, as perhaps it was designed to be, sudden and startling. From the dusty side road flanked on one side by that erection of crude brickwork, he was transported without any kind of preparation into a finished and extensively cultivated garden of unusual extent and beauty. Seen from that entrance by the little lodge, the garden wonderfully displayed itself. It lay on a moderate slope, lifting up in a steady rise from the entrance gates to the climax of the house, that spread itself along the crest of the hill with an effect of dignified watchfulness. And the designer of that garden had had fine natural material to work upon other than the slope that provided the excuse for that triple tier of terraces with their shallow stone steps and low

balustrading. He had had, for example, a fine selection of forest trees, elm, oak, and beech, with as a contrast a plantation of larches and silver birch bounding the estate on the east side. Also he had had an abundance of running water. A little river, its point of entrance hidden by the close shrubberies and plantations that shut out all sight of the ugly boundary wall on the garden side, cascaded not too artificially, out of obscurity into the sunlight, ran as a decently restrained little river for a hundred yards or so between close-cut lawns, the upper one of which was bordered by a row of graceful wych elms; and then spread itself into an irregular lake, over which the main drive to the house was carried by the spring of a slender bridge. But any catalogue of that garden's innumerable "features" must inevitably convey a false impression. Whoever had planned it, had had the genius to conceive his effect as a whole. It was arranged, composed, to display itself from the entrance lodge as a broad mass that was presented to the mind as a miniature park, abounding with natural opportunities, which had for many years been scrupulously kept, planted, and mown. And seen thus on the broad, it could not be classified as belonging either to the formal or the landscape type; rather it had the air of a diligently cultivated suburban garden enormously enlarged. There was something new, bright, almost deliberately factitious in its pretensions.

The chauffeur had but one comment to offer as they spun up the long curve of the gravel drive to the house. As they crossed the stone bridge over the pond, he pointed to the right, indicating a rough-cast and half-timbered building nearly hidden by the trees of the larch plantation into which the little river plunged out of sight.

## 22 *THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING*

"Power house, sir," he explained. "We do all our own lighting and pumping by water-power. Pleased to show you over, sir, if you have time. Nice little plant we've got."

Arthur found a sense of satisfaction in the thought of the completeness of the place.

### III



### III

ARTHUR remembered the bridge and the lake now that he saw them again. He had had some vague recollection of an immense sheet of water and an equally immense bridge that he had vaguely connected—he thought, mistakenly—with his boyhood visits to Hartling. The only other thing he remembered was a colossal elephant's pad in the hall. He found it still there, and in the interval of twenty years, it had diminished less than the lake. The detail of the house itself had apparently left little impression on his boyish mind. As he glanced round the hall, he had an uncertain feeling of being familiar with that massive staircase, but he had no idea how the rooms were placed.

His bags had gone round to some other entrance with the car; and as he gave his keys to the butler Arthur realised the splendid support of his expensive outfit. It made a difference, gave him assurance, a sense of being at home in these surroundings. That outfit was worth the money if only for the one week-end. It would have been absolutely rotten to have spent his whole time in trying to live down shabby clothes.

There seemed to be a perfect crowd of people in the room into which he was shown by the butler after having elected to go straight in to tea. He presumed it was a regular week-end party.

His aunt got up when he was announced and came across the room to greet him. She was a little tired-looking woman with a distinct likeness to his

own mother, who had died in the first year of the war. He had always attributed that gray, pinched, slightly distracted air, in his mother's case, to the difficulties of life in a country parish on insufficient means; but as his aunt had the same air it was probably a family characteristic.

Mrs Kenyon's voice and manner also reminded him of his mother.

"How you've altered, Arthur," she said in a low, even voice.

"In twenty years, aunt," he reminded her cheerfully, "one grows a certain amount."

"I've seen you since then," she said quietly, "in town. Your poor mother brought you to see me off at Charing Cross: your first year at the hospital, I think it was. Now, come and have some tea."

She led him towards the tea-table as she spoke, and introduced him in passing to her husband, a bald, rather untidy man, who was lying back in an arm-chair. "How're you?" he said indifferently to the newly recovered nephew. "Little chap in knickerbockers, about three foot nothing, last time I saw you."

Arthur smiled his acknowledgment of this reminiscence with, he hoped, an effect of not caring whether he was remembered or not. These people were certainly not effusive; but probably this was their usual manner. The more money you had the less you troubled about manners and personal appearance. His uncle had been wearing a soft, rather crumpled collar and old flannel bags. Miss Kenyon, the eldest of the family, was presiding at the tea-table. She was a tall, white-haired woman of sixty or so, with what Arthur mentally described to himself as a "domineering expression." She hardly smiled as she shook hands with him.



"I remember your first visit here very well," she said, and he grasped at the opportunity to avoid the usual futilities of an opening conversation.

"Only the vaguest recollection of it myself, Miss Kenyon," he replied brightly, as he accepted the tea she offered him. "I dare say that's because my earlier memories have been rather overlaid by the experiences of the last six years." He felt that he had taken rather a sound line. He could see chances of quite good talking ahead, supported by a backing of medical and psychological authority.

Miss Kenyon, however, cut him off by saying in her cold, clear voice, "One wouldn't expect you to remember much, you were only five."

He couldn't believe it. "Oh! surely a lot more than that," he protested. "About nine or ten, I thought."

"Jubilee year," Miss Kenyon affirmed quietly, but with an air of final authority. "In August."

Arthur did not care to contradict her again, but he was still unconvinced. "Was it really?" he asked. "Astonishing how one forgets!"

Miss Kenyon was not to be deceived by this simulation of agreement.

"Don't you remember, Hannah?" she asked, turning to her sister-in-law, who had sat down near them, and was apparently brooding over the emptiness of life.

Mrs Kenyon started. "Remember, Esther? Oh! when Arthur came before," she said. "Not very distinctly, I am afraid. But he was quite a little fellow, in a holland tunic. I remember that because he got himself very dirty one morning, and poor Emily hadn't got a change for him."

Miss Kenyon nodded calmly. "In any case," she

remarked, "we can verify the date without difficulty. I shall have a note of it in my diary."

"Esther is always accurate in her facts," her sister-in-law murmured. "Her memory is simply wonderful."

Miss Kenyon did not acknowledge this compliment. She was looking out through the great bay-window that was one of the principal features of the room in which they were sitting. Her expression was one of conscious authority—supreme, unquestionable.

Arthur felt snubbed, and, for the moment could think of no other suitable topic of conversation. Perhaps it would be advisable to admit that he was wrong, before he tried another subject.

"Stupid of me," he tried. "But as I was saying just now, the experiences of the past few years have rather altered one's scale of values. I probably mixed up my visit here with some other visit I paid with my mother when I was a bit older. One does that, sometimes."

He paused. Miss Kenyon was regarding him with a quiet, detached interest. It was evident that she had no further intention of interrupting him if he cared to go on talking, but that he must not expect any sort of response.

Arthur dropped his thesis with a slight sense of irritation and turned to his aunt.

"Aren't there some cousins of mine I ought to know?" he asked.

She indicated her two children with what Arthur thought to be a singular lack of enthusiasm. "That is Hubert by the fireplace. Elizabeth is over there in the window. I will introduce you to them when you have finished your tea."

Arthur took stock of his two cousins with atten-

tion. He was beginning to wonder if he were not in for an uncommonly depressing week-end. His observations of the third generation did little to reassure him.

Hubert was a young man of about twenty-five, with a long, melancholy face. He was dressed in rough tweeds, and wearing cloth gaiters, that gave him the look of a man whose interests lay among horses. And in Arthur's experience men who talked about horses were quite unable to talk about anything else. Elizabeth, a rather pretty girl, probably two or three years younger than her brother, was more interesting, but she, too, had the same expression of lassitude.

Arthur, still brightly aware of his newly recovered youth, felt as if he would like to take her by the arm and run with her out into the sunlight; shake her, make her sing and dance, force her to show some signs of enjoying her consciousness of life.

"And the little man talking to Hubert, who is he?" Arthur had no urgent desire to hurry the introduction to his cousins, and he was thoroughly enjoying the various cakes provided for tea.

He had not tasted cakes like these since the war. Also, Miss Kenyon had now gone from the table and left the room, and he felt more free to talk. Aunt Hannah might be rather dull but she was at least reasonably polite.

"That's Charles Turner," she told him. "He married Mr Kenyon's second daughter, Katherine—she's over there in the window by Elizabeth. Charles is the uncle of the present Lord Greening, you know."

Arthur did not know, but he nodded as he replied, "Are they staying here for the week-end?"

"Oh! no," Mrs Kenyon said. "We all live here."

There is no one from outside here this week-end—except yourself.”

Was that the reason for their tepidity? Arthur reflected. He was some one “from the outside” intruding upon the family circle. Perhaps, in spite of their wealth, the Kenyon family mixed very little with the outside world. They were a complete group living within the enceinte of that ten-foot brick wall, self-sufficient, and it might be a little self-conscious in the presence of a stranger. That general air of lassitude and of—there was some other element in it that he could not quite define—might be the effect of shyness which, as he knew, often took strange forms. Not that Miss Kenyon had appeared to suffer from any known form of shyness. She was evidently an overbearing woman.

“You’re quite a large family party, aunt,” he commented to keep the conversation going.

Mrs Kenyon blinked as if he had in some way touched upon a sore subject. She gave, however, no hint of that in her reply. “And there’s Eleanor, whom you haven’t seen yet,” she said. “She acts as a sort of secretary to Mr Kenyon. She’s the daughter of James, the second son. He and his wife are both dead, and so is their elder daughter Margery.” She looked at her son as she added, “Charles and Katherine have a son too, but he does not live with us. He is acting as a clerk to a stock-broker. Quite a good position, I believe. Have you finished your tea? I am sure Hubert is waiting to talk to you.”

“All but, aunt,” Arthur said. “Sorry to bother you with all these questions, but I want to know who’s who to begin with. And Mr Kenyon? He isn’t down here of course.”

“He never takes tea,” Mrs Kenyon said; “and

we don't see a great deal of him at any time. I don't mean that he is in any way an invalid or a recluse, you know, but at his age . . ."

"Oh! precisely," Arthur agreed. His aunt's sentence had tailed out into nothing, in much the same tone as that of the chauffeur when he had hesitated over precisely the same words. At his age. . . . The inference undoubtedly was that anything might happen when a man reaches the age of ninety-one.

"He keeps awfully fit, though, doesn't he?" Arthur went on.

"Yes. He's remarkably well and active . . ." his aunt replied, paused again, and then concluded firmly, "but you will see him at dinner."

Arthur noted again that effect of some unstated contingent.

Possibly his aunt, also, was a trifle uneasy about the old man's health.

"I've really finished at last, Aunt Hannah," he said, with a smile.

She did not return the smile, but rose at once with an appearance of relief. Arthur felt as if he ought to apologise for having bored her.

His cousin Hubert greeted him, as Arthur had expected, without enthusiasm. He turned almost at once to the Hon. Charles Turner, hoping that there he might perhaps find some kind of response.

Turner was a small man whose age might have been anything between sixty and seventy, but he at least, obviously took trouble over his dress, and his rather elvish face was crinkled into an expression that gave promise of a rather satirical humour. Once or twice Arthur had caught Turner's gaze resting upon him with a slightly quizzical look.

"You've gone in for medicine, I hear," Turner

began, and without waiting for a reply, continued: "Depressing kind of profession, isn't it? Always listening to other people's complaints?"

Arthur had never considered that aspect of the doctor's life. "Oh! I don't know," he said. "There are other things besides diagnosis. I mean . . ."

"Oh! quite," Turner cut in; "but you're always with sick people. That's what you're for. Don't you find yourself getting in the way of looking at every one as a possible patient?"

"Lord, no," Arthur replied, laughing. "You don't get so wrapped up in it as all that."

"*You* don't, perhaps," Turner said. "You're young yet, and I dare say you can drop your work when you are away from it. But I know a fellow, a Harley Street specialist, great authority on the heart . . ."

"Sir Stephen Hunt?" Arthur put in.

"That's the chap," Turner agreed. "Well, he's a terrible fellow. You'll see him looking round a dinner table and spotting symptoms. I remember sitting near him at dinner one night, and after the women had gone, he leant over to me and said, 'D'you know how long Lady Spendale has been suffering from'—let's see what did he call it—some sort of goitre?"

"Exophthalmic, possibly," Arthur supplied.

"I believe it was. She had rather protuberant eyes, I remember."

"That's it," Arthur confirmed him.

"Well, naturally I didn't even know she'd got it, if she had," Turner continued. "But what I mean is—ghastly sort of life to lead, always trying to spot something wrong with people's hearts or what not. Now, d'you mean to tell me honestly that you can help looking out for symptoms like that, more

or less? Supposing I'd got protuberant eyes, for instance?"

"That's such a frightfully obvious thing," Arthur objected. "As a matter of fact, there aren't so many diseases that can be diagnosed like that at sight. And—and—well, one rather gets out of the way of looking for them when one's off duty. As a student, I'll admit, one did a certain amount of showing off; kind of a game, you know, trying to spot the symptoms you'd just been reading up. But one soon dropped that."

"H'm! Well! And so you like doctoring, do you? Got a practice, or what?" Turner asked.

"No, nothing at the moment," Arthur said. "I've been helping a friend down in Peckham, but I've chucked that for the time being."

"Loose end? What?" Turner inquired.

"Got some notion of going to Canada," Arthur said.

Turner pursed his mouth and looked down at his neat patent-leather shoes. "Fine climate and splendid opportunities there," he commented softly. "Free, open-air life and all that sort of thing. Just suit a vigorous young chap like you, I should say."

Hubert Kenyon, who had been gloomily listening to the conversation without attempting to join in it, drew a long breath and exhaled it in a deep sigh.

"That how you feel about it?" Arthur inquired.

"I? Oh! How d'you mean?" Hubert asked.

"Blowing a bit, weren't you, at the mention of Canada?" Arthur said.

"Oh! That! I don't know," Hubert replied, without throwing much light on the meaning of his sigh.

The conversation was dropping again. Arthur felt the silence coming, and did not care. He was

## 34 THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

a guest and it was the family's duty to entertain him. But what was the matter with them all? Or with him?

He looked down the room. Miss Kenyon had come back, and they were all sitting about, reading or working in an uninterested kind of way—doing something or other as if it did not matter whether the thing was done or not. What was it the place and the people reminded him of? Yes! It was that boarding-house he had stayed in at Scarborough one winter. He had been there for a week with his mother. But that was a very different kind of place, and those were very different people. This room was beautifully designed and furnished, and these relations and connections of his were all rich and presumably care-free. Nevertheless there was something that reminded him of that Scarborough boarding-house. Something in the pose of those indifferently diligent women, perhaps?

The voice of Hubert broke in on his meditations.

"I don't know what we're waiting here for?" he said. "Care to come and have a look at the garden?"

"Thanks. Yes, I should," Arthur replied cheerfully.

He had it now. They all had the effect of waiting for something; for some climax, or change, or interruption; of waiting interminably for some known or unknown crisis that might never develop. Mr Turner was politely yawning as he stooped to pick up the *Times*.



# IV



## IV

THE garden was certainly wonderful. The modern house, although it had a well-designed south elevation, in which effective use had been made of mullioned oriel windows corbelled out from the first floor, was less successful inside—if the architect's intention had been to give the impression of age and dignity. The decoration and arrangement conveyed the effect of a really first-class hotel rather than that of an Elizabethan Manor, or even of a gentleman's country-house. This may have been due to the fact that it had been built in the late 'seventies of the last century, a bad period for country-house architecture; or it may have been a result of the exercise of old Mr Kenyon's domestic taste in furniture arrangement.

No such indictment could be brought against the garden. It was unique in its variety—full of contrasts and surprises; a place to explore, and to get lost in, but more particularly a place that had a dozen settings from which the seeker might choose a mood.

Arthur, finding new cause for astonishment and rapture at every turn, was enthusiastic in his expressions of admiration. After French battlefields, base hospitals, and Peckham, this garden seemed to him a true fairyland.

Even the melancholy Hubert became a trifle more cheerful.

"Yes, it is pretty good, isn't it?" he agreed. "'Course it has been worked at, day and night almost, you might say, for forty years."

"What happened to it during the war?" Arthur asked.

"Four of our gardeners were over age," Hubert said, "and we got boys to work under them. At first, that is. We had some wounded Tommies afterwards."

"You weren't in it yourself?" Arthur asked.

Hubert coloured faintly. "No, my grandfather got me a job in a Government office," he said. "I wanted to join up, but he wouldn't let me. I'm sort of steward to this place, you know. There are a couple of farms and so on to look after. Not that I have much to do. However, what I mean is that my grandfather made a tremendous point of keeping me out of the Army, and it was rather difficult for me to disobey him right out. He's—he's not altogether easy to handle."

"Bit of an autocrat in his way?" Arthur suggested.

Hubert looked uneasy. "In a way, yes," he agreed; and Arthur inferred that a tactful change of subject was advisable.

"Have you got names for all these different parts of the garden?" he asked, choosing the most obvious topic.

Hubert did not appear to have heard the question. He was frowning and fidgeting; he had the look of a weak man trying to make an important decision.

"You don't know him, do you?" he said. "What I mean is, you've never been here since you came as a boy, and you've never kept in with us or anything?"

"No, he's to all intents and purposes an utter stranger to me," Arthur agreed.

"Just come down to have a look at us, then?"

Hubert continued, with a feeble affectation of sprightliness.

"Well, you and my aunt are about the only relations I've got," Arthur replied. "And as Aunt Hannah wrote out of the blue, as it were, and invited me to come down, I was glad of the opportunity."

"Oh! yes, exactly," Hubert said. "I can understand that all right."

Arthur was aware again of that sense of irritation that had come to him when he had been trying to talk to Miss Kenyon. He felt as if his cousin, in another manner, was also opposing him, was in some way suspicious and inimical.

"Well what is it you don't understand?" he asked curtly.

Hubert smiled, with the placatory air of a dog that has been threatened. He was standing with his feet crossed and rocked slowly from one to the other as he spoke.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing, I was just wondering if you wanted the old man's influence for anything, get you a job as medical attendant to anyone or something of that sort."

"Good Lord, no," Arthur returned brusquely. "Never entered my head for a moment. Didn't I tell you that I thought of going out to Canada for a year or two?"

So that was why these Kenyons had been unfriendly. They believed that he had come down there cadging for influence. He grew warm at the thought of that implication, and raised his voice slightly as he continued:—

"Pretty rotten aspersion to make that, wasn't it, Hubert? After Aunt Hannah had written and invited me to come down?"

"Don't see anything rotten in it. Natural enough," Hubert replied, still rocking gently and looking down at his crossed ankles. "However—sorry. There's no need to get excited about it." He looked up and added: "Here's Eleanor. You haven't met her yet."

They had been standing in a little cloister of formal garden, shut in by a sturdy box hedge, pierced only by two openings at the opposite corners, and Arthur's back had been presented to the opening through which they had entered. He turned with a touch of impatience at the indication of Hubert's introduction, to meet this new Kenyon connection—the orphan who acted as secretary to her grandfather. He was not predisposed in her favour. Hubert had put a new idea into his head by accusing him of cadging for influence. Was it not probable that all these descendants of the old man were, in some sense, at least, trying to "keep in" with him, trying to win his special favour for their own ends?

But at his first sight of her, Arthur saw that Eleanor was different from the others. There was something alive and individual about her, she had not that effect of a slight staleness which the other members of the family seemed to convey.

"This is Arthur Woodroffe," Hubert said, completing the introduction.

She gave Arthur her hand, regarding him, he thought, with a strangely intent look of anxiety.

"I heard you quarrelling as I came," she said. "Rather soon, isn't it?"

She had a pleasant voice, with a musical, soothing tone; the voice of a woman who would make a good nurse, Arthur thought.

"I don't know that we'd got as far as a quarrel," he said. "I confess that my new-found cousin, Hubert, annoyed me rather."

Hubert raised his eyebrows. He had not moved when Eleanor joined them, and still stood in that uneasy looking pose of his. "Can't imagine why," he said. "Only asked him if he wanted grandfather's influence to get a job anywhere."

Eleanor frowned faintly and shrugged her shoulders. "Oh! my good Hubert, how unoriginal of you," she said.

Arthur was faintly perplexed by the adjective. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I was just telling Hubert that what I want to do is to go out to Canada."

Eleanor's expression perceptibly brightened. She might have been the recipient of good news. "How splendid," she said warmly, "to go to a new and *free* country like that."

Arthur accepted that statement as a true expression of feeling. There had been a warmth, an air of admiring congratulation in her tone, that enchanted him after the chilliness of his reception in the drawing-room.

"It would be rather a jolly adventure," he said. "I've got enough money for my passage, and outfit, and all that, and I don't suppose I should have any difficulty in getting a post of some kind out there."

She was about to reply when Hubert unhitched himself and remarking that he had something to do before dinner, wandered aimlessly away in the direction of the lower garden.

For a moment the thread of the conversation was broken. Both Arthur and Eleanor were watching the departing figure of their cousin, and, as often

happens when a third person leaves a group, the other two were aware of an impulse to speak of him.

"Poor old Hubert," Eleanor murmured in an undertone. "There's probably nothing in the world he would like better than to go to Canada."

Arthur was surprised. He had already made some sort of estimate of his cousin's character, and sized him up roughly as a "feeble sort of rotter."

"Well, then, why doesn't he?" he asked.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he did," Eleanor replied, looking thoughtfully across the formal garden. "However, I dare say he'll tell you about it himself when he knows you a little better. You're—you're rather *new* to us just at present. We're so secluded here. We don't very often see people from the outside."

Arthur marked that repetition of his aunt's phrase with a slight sense of uneasiness. "Queer thing to say," he remarked. "Why from the 'outside'? Aunt Hannah used the same expression at tea. Sounds rather as if you were all confined in a prison or an asylum."

Eleanor blushed and bit her lip. "Yes, it's a stupid phrase," she said quickly. "I didn't mean it the least in that way. Only we are so—what shall I say?—so self-sufficient. We've everything we want, nearly; and—oh! never mind. Is this as much of the garden as you've seen?" She led him across the little quadrangular enclosure as she continued: "I should like to show you my favourite place, if you haven't been there yet. It's just a little lower down, on the terrace, overlooking the stream and the lake. And I want you to tell me about Canada. You're a full-fledged doctor, aren't you? Aunt Hannah said you wrote from Peckham. Were you practising there?"



As they made their way to the terrace she had indicated, Arthur told her something of his work in Peckham and of his reasons for wishing to leave it. He expected sympathy from her, but he found none.

"I dare say it was dirty," was her comment—his insistence on that aspect had demanded a reply—"but it was work, real work. You *were* doing some good in the world."

They had reached the terrace now, and from where they stood they overlooked a croquet lawn—flush and smooth as a green carpet—bounded on its further side by the row of wych elms and the stream. Beyond, they could see the falling slope of the garden down to the shrubberies that hid the wall; but from this point there was no vista of the rich Sussex landscape without.

Arthur sighed. "I had had six years of it," he said, "and I had a sort of feeling that I wanted to—to recover my youth for a bit. I wanted to try something of this sort for a change."

"Of *this* sort?" she repeated on a note of perplexity.

"I suppose it's impossible for you to realise what it means to me," he replied. "You've had it always. You think just because this is what you're used to and perhaps tired of, that it's very splendid and exhilarating to work in the slums. If you had had my experience, you'd understand that to me this garden seems a sort of Paradise. You can't appreciate the attractions of this sort of life unless you come in, as I do—from the outside."

She was obviously troubled by that outburst. "And how long do you think you could stand being shut in here?" she asked, after a pause.

"At this moment, it seems to me that I could stand quite a lot of it," Arthur said.

He knew that he was not saying the things she wanted him to say. He could feel her longing to hear him disparage the delights of Hartling and enlarge upon those of what she had called "real work." But her very urgency made it impossible for him to respond in his present mood. Also, he was aware of a curious desire to contradict her, even to hurt her. It was, as he put it to himself, all very well for her to talk about things she knew nothing about. He looked at her with a new criticism, and her youth and freshness seemed almost an offence. The whiteness of her hands, the spotlessness of her pale gray linen dress, the clearness of her complexion and of her blue eyes, even the lines of her firm, well-nourished young figure were all effects of the protected life she had lived. It was not for her to find fault with him for wanting some share of the luxury that to the Kenyons had become commonplace.

"You surely don't mean that you would care to stay—to *live* here?" she was saying.

The little bark of laughter with which he replied held a note of derision.

"Does it seem so extraordinary," he said, "that after five years of dirt and disease and unmentionable minor tortures, a man should hanker after a little cleanliness and comfort?"

She shook her head. "No, no, of course not," she said. "I didn't in the least mean that. I'd like you to have a rest. You've earned it. It's just that . . . this sort of thing can't go on always. You wouldn't like, would you, to stay here indefinitely, even if you could?"

He knew that he was being a trifle perverse as he answered that. "Too good to be true," he said.

She looked at him again with that look of earnest

inquiry with which she had first greeted him. "If you really think that . . ." she began, and then stopped abruptly. "We ought to be getting back," she went on in another tone. "Dinner is at eight. We shall only have half an hour to dress. You'll see my grandfather this evening. He sent you a message and I came out to give it to you, but . . . However, he told me to ask you if you couldn't stay on for a day or two; whether you need go back to town on Monday? I'll tell him what you've said. Do you mind if I go on? I have one or two things to see to before dinner."

Before he had time to answer, she was running back towards the house. She ran lightly and gracefully, with the ease and vigour of an active girl of twenty.

Arthur following, kept her in sight as long as he could.

"Rather a 'ripper,' " was the comment that came first to his mind. It was followed by the determination to stay at Hartling as long as they could put up with him—or he with them. In his thought of "them" he was picturing the "crowd" he had met at tea-time.

Dressing for dinner was a delightful experience. Eleanor, whether deliberately or not, had made a mistake in the time, and when Arthur had found his room with the help of the butler, he had a full thirty-five minutes in which to dress.

The first five of them were spent in a blissful revel in his surroundings. He had a bathroom all to himself—a perfect bathroom with white walls above a tiled dado of pale green that curved round smoothly at its base to form a tiled floor of the same colour. The bath and lavatory basin were of

white porcelain with nickel-silver taps, and the ample bossy towel rails heated by hot water, were also of nickel silver.

And his bedroom was so bright and exquisitely clean. It was done in the modern style with simple effective furniture almost devoid of mouldings. The motive of the colour scheme was an unobtrusive blue, taken up in the carpet, the faintly patterned wallpaper and the linen curtains at the window. And from the window itself, the approach to which was not encumbered by furniture, he could look out above the shrubberies and the wall and catch glimpses between the trees of the great swelling lines of Sussex, of the immense background and setting of this jewelled Hartling garden.

He leaned out and sniffed the sweetness of the evening air. Twenty-four hours ago, he had been in the midst of London foulness, irritable with the grit and dust of a hot evening in late May. Now he had this freshness and sweetness to savour and delight in. The contrast was that between Hell and Heaven. Already his skin felt cleaner.

With a sudden whoop of joy he came back into the room and began to strip himself. He would have a bath at once, and another when he came to bed. Lovely hot water, nice soap, and splendid warm towels. Ripping house! Would he stay as long as he could? Wouldn't he rather! He would stay altogether if he had the chance. Lord, what fools these people were downstairs, not to know when they were well off.

He was putting on his dinner jacket as the second gong sounded, and he tore down the stairs just in time to join the straggling procession that was crossing the hall. They had not waited for him.

He caught his uncle looking at him with a smile, and ranged himself beside him.

"Feel pretty young, what?" his uncle said with a chuckle.

"Fairly fresh," Arthur agreed. "Jolly place, this."

"Yes, fine place," his uncle admitted.

Arthur, remembering that his uncle was the eldest son, and would probably inherit the property, decided that he was a person to be propitiated. Also, he seemed, on the whole, to be less inimical than the others.

When they reached the dining-room, Arthur had his first sight of the founder and head of the House of Kenyon.

He was already seated at the far end of the long, narrow table, and as the family went to their places he watched them with a calm paternal smile of satisfaction. Then, almost by chance it seemed, his glance rested on the new-comer, and his expression changed to one of more vivid interest. He made a slight inclination of the head in Arthur's direction, and turning to his daughter-in-law said in a clear, thin voice:—

"Hannah! Bring Arthur Woodroffe up and introduce him to me."

He called it an introduction, but there was, Arthur thought, a dignity about the formal request that gave the function almost the air of a presentation.

But here, at least, was no sign of that aloofness which had marked his reception by the rest of the family. The old man was gracious and friendly.

"Eleanor gave me your message," he said. "I'm so glad that you will be able to stay with us for a

few days. We must have a talk. I want to hear something of your experiences in the war. But not to-night." His smile had again that gentle, paternal quality as he concluded with a nod of dismissal. "You must indulge the humours of a very old man, and let me choose my own time."

Arthur went back to his place at the other end of the table, with a faint sense of awe.

Mr Kenyon was certainly a wonderful old man. Arthur's mind reverted continually to that thought in the fairly long intervals between the snatches of polite conversation he held with Miss Kenyon, who was on his right at the foot of the table, or with his pretty but uninteresting Cousin Elizabeth on his other side. Hubert, who was immediately opposite, was plunged in a melancholy silence.

But in what, precisely, the wonder of Mr. Kenyon lay, Arthur was a little uncertain. His appearance was certainly striking. He had abundant white hair, not dead white like his eldest daughter's, but with the smooth sheen like the gloss of a pearl, and with something too of an old pearl's cream in the colour. His eyes were a pale blue, with a hint of brilliance that was lacking in his daughter, who greatly resembled him in many ways. But the queer thing that Arthur presently disentangled from his analysis was that the old man, in spite of his alertness and vigour, looked his age; looked, indeed, as if he might have been any age. His skin was not so much lined as crinkled. There were no deep furrows in his face, but the skin had the appearance of a piece of paper that had been crushed into a tight ball and then partly smoothed out. He seemed to have arrived at a stage in which he might remain indefinitely. He had achieved a physical type of the old man. He might very well look

precisely as he did now, in ten, twenty, or fifty years' time.

Yet, when all the effect of his appearance had been allowed for, there remained a cause for wonder about him that had not been explained. He was so amazingly self-confident and serene. With all his air of gentleness and affection, he had some quality of supremacy.

Two things Arthur noted in the course of dinner, that gave him still further material for reflection. The first, in so far as its immediate consequences were concerned, he could not understand.

The older generation at the further end of the table had been talking about Italy, and Arthur's uncle had apparently come to life and began an enthusiastic account of the beauties of a North Italian spring. He was talking, Arthur thought, surprisingly well. He had evidently the eyes of an artist for colour. Moreover, there was an emotional undertone in his descriptions that made them peculiarly vivid.

And then old Mr Kenyon, who had been listening with a kind, approving smile, said gently:—

"I have often wondered, Joe, why you don't live in Italy. I feel that, in many ways, you would be more at home there than here."

It seemed such a friendly, fatherly speech, but the effect of it was as if his son had been brutally reproved. He coloured slightly, hung his head, and went on with his dinner in an embarrassed silence. He had the look of a man who was thoroughly cowed. His sister, Mrs Turner, who was sitting on his right, also looked rather embarrassed.

The second observation was of another kind.

The entrée had just been removed when Arthur became aware of a curious hush that had fallen upon

the room. The service throughout had been quiet, unostentatiously efficient, but now the butler and his two attendant parlour-maids were moving about on tip-toe, and every sound of conversation had ceased.

Instinctively Arthur looked up the table at Mr Kenyon.

He was leaning back in his chair, his hands clasping the arms, his eyes were wide open, but stared unseeingly down the room. He looked like a man in a trance; it flashed into Arthur's mind that he looked like a dreaming god.

The servants were standing now by the sideboard, doing nothing. And for perhaps a couple of minutes the progress of the dinner was suspended. Every one sat in silence and waited until the dreaming god smiled and leaned forward again in his chair. He came back to his world with no sign of disturbance or shock. He was to all appearances unaware of the interval that had passed. And immediately, with a quiet inevitableness the subdued sounds of footsteps and low conversation crept back into the room.

Arthur remembered the remark of the chauffeur who had driven him from the station. What was it he had said? "It's as if he were sound asleep with his eyes wide open." That explanation did not satisfy Arthur's feeling for physiological probability. He wondered if it might be a case of *petit mal*, minor epilepsy?

He looked round the table and thought that he could detect a general air of demure resignation in the bowed faces around him. Ninety-one! They were all remembering that the old man was ninety-one. Anything might happen at that age!

He glanced across the table again and saw that Eleanor was watching him. He smiled at her, but



the smile with which she answered him had no warmth in it. It was nothing but a polite response.

How jolly she looked in that soft white dress!

He returned to the enjoyment of his dinner, which seemed to him to be the best he had ever eaten. It was a simple dinner: soup, entrée, a saddle of mutton, sweet, savory, and dessert; but it was perfectly cooked and served. The clear soup had had wine in it, and a flavour that was at once delicate and strong; the entrée had had just that touch of piquancy that gave one an appetite for the joint. And the saddle was a joint to remember, so firm and tender, its richness nicely mitigated by the new potatoes and green peas that accompanied it. Arthur had a palate and could appreciate these good things. Also, although he had had a limited experience of wine, he knew that the claret was no ordinary vintage. It had an aroma like fruit. At dessert there were magnificent strawberries. Arthur found a justification for the theory that such things as new peas, potatoes, and strawberries taste better in the third week of May than at the end of June. It was, he decided, because they brought a fore-taste of summer, and the anticipation has always some exquisite flavour that is lacking in the present reality. He was pleased with this conceit and tried it on Miss Kenyon.

She regarded him thoughtfully. "It may be true when one is under forty," she said. "After that, one prefers to live in the present."

He was emboldened by the claret to press the old psychological truism to its conclusion. "And later still there comes a time, I believe, when one lives chiefly in the past," he hazarded.

"It may come to some people," Miss Kenyon said, and glanced at her father down the length of

the table. She had an unimpeded sight of him above the low silver dishes of fruit, that with their reflection in the rich dark mirror of the polished mahogany were an ample decoration.

Arthur had not enough courage to name the exception she so obviously had in her mind.

Over the dessert and the coffee and cigarettes that followed before Miss Kenyon rose from the table, Arthur at last discovered a subject for discussion with his cousin Elizabeth. She was, it seemed, an expert croquet player, and wanted to play in tournaments. She grew quite animated in her talk of the game, although her technicalities were beyond his knowledge.

"I'll teach you, if you like," she said. "It'll be jolly to have some one new to play with. None of the others are any good really."

"I expect I'd pick it up pretty quickly," Arthur replied with a touch of pique. "I'm fairly good at those sort of games, billiards, and golf, and so on, you know."

Elizabeth smiled the condescending smile of the expert. "It's chiefly a matter of constant practice, of course," she said. "I generally put in a couple of hours every day."

In his heart Arthur thought that croquet was rather a piffling game, and had an inner conviction that he would very soon be able to give his cousin a good match. He made an appointment with her to take his first lesson the next morning. The Kenyons were not Sabbatarians. "No one goes to church, hardly, except mother," Elizabeth told him.

Later he discovered another example of expertise in the family. Old Mr Kenyon did not accompany his family to the drawing-room, and after a few aimless minutes, in the course of which most of the

family settled themselves down to the same occupations that had engaged them after tea, Mr Turner came across the room and asked if he would "care for a game of billiards."

Arthur assented with enthusiasm. He rather fancied himself as a billiard player, and in any case there was nothing else to do. Presently he might get up a flirtation with Elizabeth, but the beginning of that could very well wait until the croquet lesson. She had looked up at him and smiled as he was leaving the drawing-room, and he had returned the smile and waved his hand.

Eleanor, presumably, was with her grandfather.

His evening's billiards served him as an object-lesson, in how the game ought to be played. After the first game, Turner gave him two hundred start in three hundred up; a handicap that produced a fairly close finish.

Turner admitted that he kept himself in practice. "Nothing much else to do," he explained, "except get licked by Elizabeth at croquet."

"And what's your game?" Arthur asked Hubert, who had strolled in while they were playing and had been marking for them.

"Play golf a bit," Hubert said. "There's quite a decent course about a mile from here. I go over most days. Give you a game any time you like."

"Well, I didn't bring any clubs down," Arthur replied. "Had no practice to speak of, you see, in the last six years, but I used to be rather keen."

"Hubert is hot stuff," Turner commented. "Plus two, isn't it, now, Hubert?"

"Three, since I won the last medal," was his nephew's reply.

"Good Lord! Why that's Amateur Championship form," Arthur exclaimed.

"Oh! hardly that!" Hubert thought. He appeared to be quite indifferent to Arthur's admiration.

When he was alone in his delightful bedroom, Arthur made a reflective audit of his day's experience. The balance he arrived at was that he would thoroughly enjoy his visit to Hartling.

Miss Kenyon was rather a dragon—a cold, practical woman, probably a very good manager, was his estimate of her—and none of them had been particularly cordial to him, although old Turner had relaxed to a certain extent when they were playing billiards. But there were overwhelming compensations to set against this small discouragement.

He looked round his bedroom and drew a deep breath of contentment, then went into the bathroom and turned on the hot water. The window was open and he drew back the curtain and leaned out. What a comfort it was not to be overlooked, to know that there was nothing out there but the sweetness and serenity of the night! It gave him a sense of freedom and cleanliness, of being in touch with Nature.

But when he was in his bath his thoughts turned back to less æsthetic compensations. The great and essential question of what he was going to *do* at Hartling, had been solved for him. There would be games, a succession of games of various kinds, to be played with skill against opponents from whom he would be learning all the time. (That old chap Turner was a fair nailer at billiards! He played all his shots with "drag" like a professional!) He would not, of course, be able to improve his own game appreciably in three or four days, but with luck he might be asked to stay a

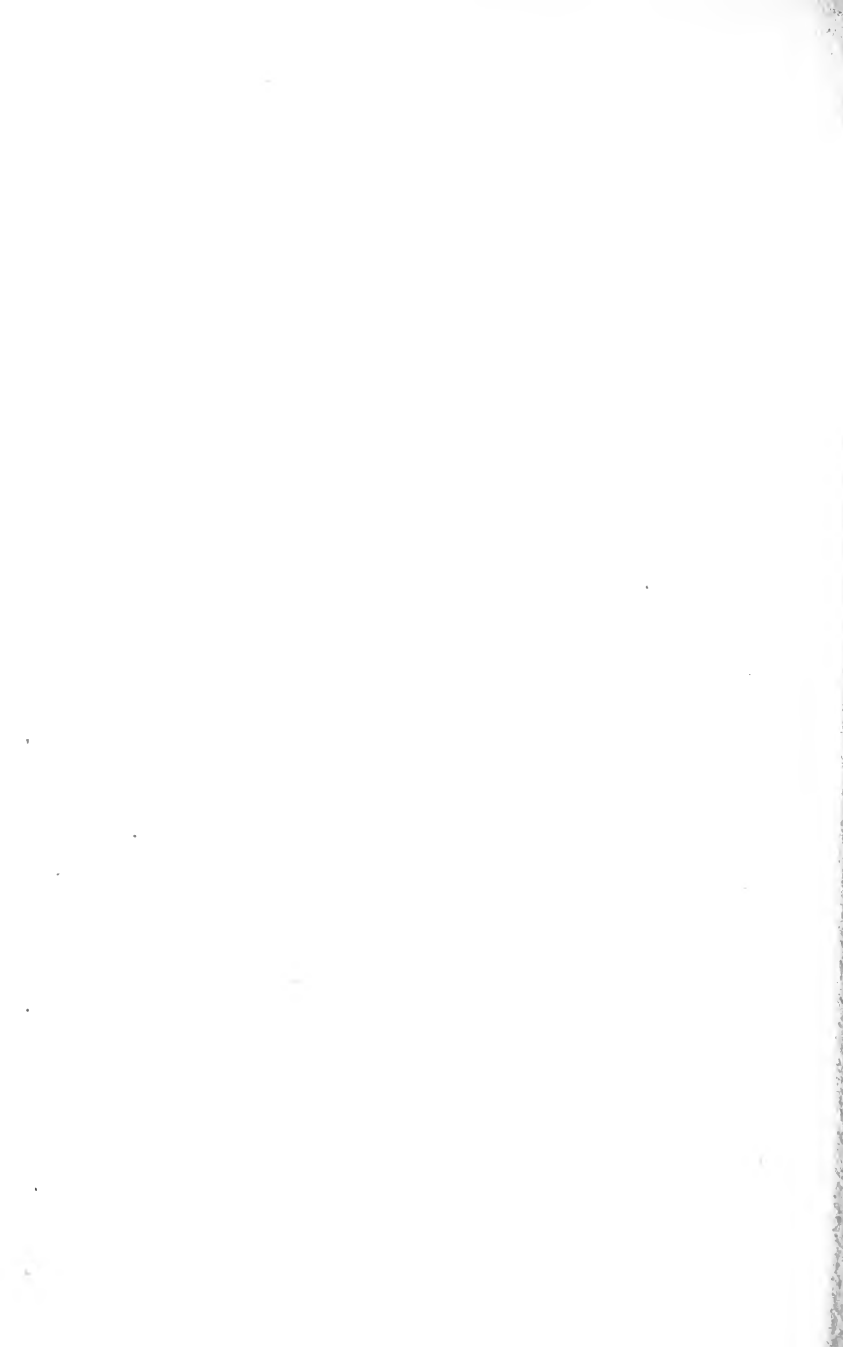
week. He would accept like a bird if they did ask him. . . . He must try to entertain the old man when that promised talk came off. He was evidently the boss still, in spite of his age. The invitation to stay had come straight from him. He was an impressive old fellow too, with a remarkable air of dignity and what one spoke of vaguely as "personality." He gave you the feeling that he would get his own way about things. . . . His eldest son did not take after him. Rather a sloppy chap, Uncle Joe. His tie had been all round his neck by the end of dinner. Funny the way he had shut up about Italy. He was probably only a gasser, and did not in the least want to live there. He would certainly let the property down when he came into it, unless he had some one to look after it for him.

Arthur had a contempt for slackness. His opinion of his cousin had gone up a hundred per cent. since he had learnt that Hubert's handicap was "plus three." That was a form of efficiency. Melancholy-looking devil, though. They were all a bit on that side for some reason or another; looked depressed and bored, as if they were tired of waiting for something . . . except Eleanor. She was different from the others. Different, but not necessarily nicer. There was a touch of the school-mistress about her. She wanted to do what she thought were the right things.

Elizabeth might be amusing when one got to know her better.









## V.

**A**RTHUR saw very little of Eleanor and old Mr Kenyon in the course of the next few days. They had lunch and dinner with the family, and once or twice he caught sight of them in the garden while he was playing croquet with Elizabeth; but on none of these occasions did he find an opportunity of speaking to either of them. Meanwhile, he was improving his acquaintance with the other members of the party permanently assembled at Hartling; although further than that he was unable to go. He had revised his first impression of them as being definitely inimical, but they remained acquaintances.

His uncle and Mr Turner had come nearest to passing beyond the limitations of polite intercourse; and the latter had shown an interest in Arthur's plans for the future; had, indeed, discussed with him the prospects of getting an appointment in Canada, and promised him two or three introductions. But the point at which he and all the others had drawn back, had been the returning of any sort of confidence. They offered none, and put him off if he attempted any question. They left him with the impression of some important reserve behind all their treatment of him. It was as if they all shared some secret that he could never know. When he was with them he could never forget that he was an outsider, not one of the family.

He had even been aware of that reserve as a check upon the development of his flirtation with Elizabeth. She at once encouraged him and kept him at a distance. She might have been a princess

of the blood, amusing herself with a member of the nobility whom she might know but could never marry. He had been definitely piqued by that attitude in his own first cousin, and had tried to break down her defence, to claim her as an equal and a contemporary. So far, however, that attempt had been a failure. She had not apparently resented his overtures, but they had not advanced his intimacy with her. There was some invisible barrier always between them, a barrier that seemed to be essential and permanent.

He was sorry because he believed that he was ready to fall in love with her if she would let him. She was certainly pretty in a general sort of way, with brown eyes, rather dark hair, and a fair skin that had freckled over the bridge of her snub nose. And her mastery of the game of croquet had been a revelation to him. He had realised on that first Sunday morning how scientific a game croquet could be, played on that perfect lawn. She was as much his superior, hopelessly beyond rivalry in her own game as Charles Turner or Hubert were in theirs. Her tennis was fairly good, too; quite as good as his own, but she complained that she got no practice. Hubert played, but none of the others, except Eleanor, who seldom had any time for games.

Arthur was taking a lesson from Mr Turner in the billiard-room at a quarter to seven on Tuesday evening when Eleanor came in to him with a message.

She waited while her uncle played his shot and then turning to Arthur said:—

"Would you mind dressing early to-night, Mr. Woodroffe? My grandfather thought he might find a chance of talking to you before dinner."

"Ah! yes, of course," Arthur agreed. "I'll go now." He could have no doubt that this was a command. Turner had put down his cue as if he had been prepared for some such developement as this, and took no further interest in the game. Nevertheless there must have been still something that he did not know, for he looked at Eleanor with raised eyebrows, plainly hinting a question the nature of which she, presumably, could guess; although the slight shrug of her shoulders with which she replied intimated that she did not, as yet, know the answer.

Arthur pondered that exchange of signals as he dressed. He had begun to wonder whether he might not find an explanation of various things that had puzzled him at Hartling; in the desire of the Kenyons to conceal a family secret. Was it not possible that the head of the house was slightly insane? If that were so, everything could be accounted for: their references to people coming in "from the outside"; their half-suspicious reception of himself; the separation of the old man from the family-life except at lunch and dinner; the constant attendance of Eleanor. . . . Arthur was inclined to believe that he had guessed the riddle, and resolved to be very observant during the coming interview.

He was tying his bow when some one knocked at his bedroom door. He guessed that it was Eleanor come to fetch him, and snatching at his waistcoat, called out, "One minute! I won't be a moment." But when he opened the door a few seconds later, he was amazed to find old Mr Kenyon himself standing outside.

"I'm sorry, sir, I didn't realise . . ." Arthur began.

The old man waved aside his apology. "I quite understand," he said. "Naturally you were not expecting me. May I come in?"

"Oh! please. Yes, do," Arthur responded. He felt embarrassed by this strange mark of favour. He had pictured the promised interview as likely to be something of a function. Was it possible that the old man had temporarily escaped from his keeper?

Mr Kenyon had seated himself in a little chintz-covered arm-chair and appeared quite at his ease.

"We shall be quieter here," he said with a smile. "Smoke if you want to. I haven't smoked now for fifty years, but I don't at all dislike it."

Arthur took advantage of this indulgence with a faint smile at the whimsical reflection that the old man had abandoned the habit of smoking more than twenty years before Arthur himself had been born. Mr Kenyon apparently read the young man's thought, for he went on:—

"Yes, there is a long gap between you and me, Woodroffe. I was born in the reign of George the Fourth. And I have no doubt that you find it a little difficulty to realise that I still keep in touch with present-day affairs."

Arthur, with his new suspicion fresh in his mind, was watching the old man with a more or less informed eye, and although he could find at present no least confirmation of his theory, he thought there would be no harm in attempting a leading question.

"Do you really, sir?" he commented. "You mean that you can still take a pleasure in reading about modern life, and hearing about it?"

"And in living it," Mr Kenyon said, with his gentle smile. "You must not suppose that I keep

myself shut in here. I often go to town in the car. More often, in fact, than any other member of the family."

"You must have a perfectly marvellous constitution, sir," Arthur said.

Mr Kenyon slightly shrugged his shoulders. "It seems a commonplace to me," he returned. "Perhaps because I have always had it. I have never been ill. But I did not come here to talk about myself. I am more interested in you. I want you to tell me something of your experiences in the war; and then . . ." He broke off suddenly. His keen blue eyes were intently watching Arthur's face.

"And then, sir?" Arthur prompted him.

Mr Kenyon's expression of watchfulness relaxed. "And then," he said graciously, "something of what you intend to do in the future."

Arthur would have preferred to take the second point first. He had already abandoned his theory of insanity. And it had come to him with an exhilarating sense of certainty that Mr Kenyon intended to "do something for him." When the old man had concluded his sentence, he had worn the benign, generous air of patron.

"Well, you see, sir, I joined up in August, '14," Arthur began, meaning to get the history done with as quickly as possible; but Mr Kenyon pulled him up before he had gone very far with the brief outline he had intended to draw of the main facts of his experience.

"Then you saw service in the trenches?" he put in, and when Arthur admitted that he had, began to pose some very shrewd questions as to the effect that terrible experience might have on a young man's nerves and temperament.

"But you, yourself, came through without any

permanent disaffection?" he continued, after Arthur had let himself go a little on the pathology of war-shock.

"Absolutely, as far as one can judge, sir," Arthur replied.

Mr Kenyon nodded. "I believe it is true, is it not," he asked, "that the really normal man was not subject to these nerve troubles?"

"As far as we know, sir," Arthur replied. "It's the general theory that in the bad cases of psycho-neurosis, there was always a predisposition before the man went out."

He would have gone on with a youthful pride in his knowledge to elaborate the theory, but Mr Kenyon switched him off by saying, with a change of tone that suddenly quickened Arthur's interest:—

"You are, now, a fully qualified medical man, I understand?"

"Oh! yes, fully qualified," Arthur said promptly.

Mr Kenyon nodded, and then rose and began to walk slowly up and down the room. He had a silver-headed, ebony stick with him, but he hardly leaned upon it, his back was not bowed, and his step was perfectly firm. His figure and general activity might have been that of a man of sixty.

Arthur watched him with admiration. It was almost incredible to him that the old man could be ninety-one. And it crossed his mind that his uncle might have to wait many years yet before he came into the property.

Mr Kenyon continued to walk up and down the room as he went on:—

"I have thought once or twice lately that I should like to have some one living here in the house who might . . ." he paused before he added, "who would be competent in an emergency. There is a

doctor in the village—an able, pleasant man, for whom I have considerable respect—but he lives two miles from us, and . . .” He let the sentence die away without completing it, beginning again in a firmer voice, “At my age, Arthur—I must call you that! we are, after all, connected—one has fancies. I don’t deceive myself with any foolish idea that I can live for ever. And one of my fancies, a fairly common one, I believe, is a fear of premature burial. I should like to have some one permanently here whom I could trust. Moreover, I have felt that a competent medical man with whom I was in touch, would be in a position to give me—shall I say—warning. You may be surprised to learn that I—a business man by training and inclination—have been so unbusinesslike as to have left my own affairs unsettled. There are reasons, of course, family reasons that I need not trouble you with, but you must think it very lax in a man of ninety-one not to have completed his testamentary dispositions. I have, it is true, made a will, but not a final one. I have an eccentric inclination—a touch of superstition perhaps—to postpone that duty, although my present will,” he turned and faced Arthur with an expression of humorous despair, “is nothing more or less than an untidy mass of codicils. In my opinion, it is dangerously contestable in its present state. Fleet, my lawyer, thinks otherwise, but I have had more experience than he has.

“In any case, I mean to make a new one, and since you have been here it has occurred to me that I might indulge my little eccentricity more safely if I had some competent and experienced person on whom I could rely, permanently in the household; some one who would be with me for an hour or so every day, an expert who would be in a position to

say to me: "Kenyon, I must warn you that your days are running out and it is time for you to put your affairs in order." Also, as I have said, I should prefer to trust the matter of my death certificate to a medical man in whose integrity I could have perfect confidence. These are the fancies of a very old man, no doubt, but after all why should I not indulge them if I can? I may tell you quite frankly, Arthur, that I am not of those who make a virtue of self-sacrifice."

He broke off abruptly, stood staring in front of him for a moment, as if he reflected on that last statement, and then sat down again in the chintz-covered arm-chair.

Arthur realised that the time had come for him to reply, and that he was not ready with an answer.

If the arrangement that was now suggested had been hypothecated while he was dressing, he would have laughed at the idea of refusing it; but as Mr Kenyon had been speaking, Arthur had seen a vision of his own future that had been vaguely repellent—a vision of idle, satisfied days spent in perfecting himself at various games, waiting for something that he could not precisely define. What was there to wait for in such a life as that—except death? Marriage and the begetting of children would only be incidents, comparable, perhaps, to the making of his first hundred break or doing the course in "bogey." And yet, what else had life, any life, to offer him? He had no peculiar gifts. He would never become famous. The end of him would almost certainly be a small practice somewhere and a perpetual struggle to live within his income. Nevertheless, his spirit drooped at the prospect of the life he anticipated if he accepted this offer. There was no adventure in it.



"Frightfully flattered, sir, by your—your confidence in me and so on," he muttered, "and, of course, in many ways, almost every way . . ."

Mr Kenyon stopped him. "No, no, Arthur," he said, "I haven't even made my proposal yet; and in any case I do not want you to give me an answer to-night. I understand that at your age you naturally have ambitions, that the future has romantic possibilities for you. I have not forgotten that. But," he leant forward, dropping his forehead on to the ivory handle of the stick he held between his knees, "I have a feeling that your service would not be a very long one—six months, a year perhaps, at the outside." His voice was so low that Arthur could hardly follow him as he concluded: "And then you would have . . . opportunity, greater opportunity . . . pecuniary advantages . . . I would provide for that."

Six months, a year at the outside! He probably knew as well as any one. He looked as sound as a bell, but he might go to pieces all at once. Those queer trances of his were no doubt symptomatic of some deep-seated trouble. Would it be very rotten to take on a job like that with the idea of having money left to you? Arthur fancied that he could make out a good case for himself on that score. And beyond all that personal issue there was a greater one. Putting that hypothetical legacy out of the question, would he not be doing this old man a real service by accepting his offer? He undoubtedly felt the need of some one to perform the two offices he had indicated.

"If I might consider . . ." Arthur began, and was interrupted by the sound of the second gong booming through the house.

Mr Kenyon raised his head. "Well, well,

Arthur, think it over, think it over," he said, getting to his feet. "I will only add now that it would be a great relief to me if you saw your way to accept my offer. Do not forget that side of it. And—we will have another talk to-morrow."

Arthur was aware of a new atmosphere at the dinner-table that night. For the first time since he had been in the house, the Kenyons were wide-awake and curious; the object of their curiosity was unquestionably himself. They seemed to be watching him. Whenever he looked up the table, he had the impression that one of them had just averted his or her eyes, and when he was talking to Elizabeth or Miss Kenyon, he was conscious of being under steady observation from every part of the table. Only Eleanor kept her eyes down, and to the best of his knowledge never once looked in his direction. Yet this new attitude towards him had no effect of being hostile. It was merely as if he had suddenly become an object of peculiar interest.

Even Miss Kenyon's manner was changed, although it was not until they were half-way through dinner that she put a direct question to him.

"You had your little talk with my father this evening?" she said then in a tone that sounded, he thought, a faint note of propitiation.

"Yes, I did; quite a long talk," he replied, feeling no inclination to make a confidante of Miss Kenyon.

"Has he asked you to prolong your visit to us?" she went on, making a more direct attack. "I hope you may be able to stay over the next week-end in any case."

"Thanks very much, I should like to immensely,"

Arthur returned. "Yes, Mr Kenyon did suggest something of the sort. In fact . . ."

"Well!" Miss Kenyon prompted him with a touch of asperity.

"Oh! well, in fact he made a kind of proposal to me that we are going to discuss again to-morrow," Arthur admitted.

Miss Kenyon stared at him thoughtfully for a moment.

"One more or less doesn't after all make much difference in a family like this," she said, with a touch of resignation.

"But I haven't decided yet," Arthur began.

"You will," she interrupted him dryly, and at once devoted her attention to Hubert on the other side.

"Does that mean that you're staying on indefinitely?" Elizabeth asked.

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "It seems as if you all knew more about it than I do myself," he said. "I really don't know yet."

"But he wants you to?" Elizabeth pressed him.

"Apparently," Arthur admitted.

Elizabeth sighed thoughtfully. "You're a kind of grand-nephew, I suppose," she remarked, addressing no one in particular, and then added, "Are you going to be a sort of tame medical attendant?"

"If I stay," Arthur agreed.

"You'll stay all right," Elizabeth replied, echoing her aunt's tone. "Why shouldn't you?"

"Don't you want me to stay?" Arthur asked.

"Might teach you to play croquet in time," she replied pertly.

"Is that all?" he inquired. He felt as if he were

at last getting past that barrier she had set up against him.

She met his eyes frankly and pursed her undoubtedly pretty mouth. "Oh, wait and see," she said.

"I can see now, and I don't want to wait," Arthur returned boldly.

Her smile was not one of encouragement. She had suddenly ceased to flirt with him. "Even puppies don't get their eyes open for nine days," she said coldly, "and you haven't been here four yet. You haven't the least idea what you're talking about."

Arthur frowned impatiently. He was not vexed by the snub he had received—girls of Elizabeth's type thought it "smart" to be rude—but by the reintroduction of that suggestion of a family secret which separated the Kenyons from the outside world. There was an air of arrogance about the thing that annoyed him.

"Is there so much for me to learn here?" he asked dryly.

Elizabeth told him to "shut up."

This was the way in which she always treated him; and as he rather sulkily continued his dinner he asked himself if it was "good enough." If she were willing to be decent, he might possibly fall in love with her, but he was not going to stand being treated like a schoolboy. Elizabeth might go and hang herself.

She made no attempt to entice him out of the silence he was thus too easily able to maintain for the rest of the meal.

But in the drawing-room after dinner, he found that the family as a whole seemed inclined to put him on a new footing. Even Mrs Turner, who had

so far almost ignored him, came up and began to talk about the gardens. She was a rather stout woman with something of her brother's carelessness in the matter of dress, and Arthur had wondered how her husband had ever managed to fall in love with her. To-night, however, it occurred to him for the first time that she might in her youth have been the very prototype of her niece Elizabeth.

They had only been talking for a few minutes when her brother joined them. As usual, after dinner, his face was flushed and puffy—an effect due, Arthur judged, to the food rather than to the wine he had taken.

"So you're thinking of joining the family party for a time, I hear?" he began in a friendly voice.

"Well, I haven't decided anything yet," Arthur replied, and waited to see if his uncle would echo his sister's and his daughter's "You will."

He did not. He was fidgeting with his cigar, the ash of which he had dropped and smeared all over his dinner-jacket and waistcoat.

"Giving up the Canada idea, any way?" was his response.

"It was never more than an idea," Arthur said.

"Not a bad one, all the same," his uncle murmured, and then apparently feeling that he was making a mess of what he had to say, he went on, "However, it's not for me to advise you. I can't boast that I'm any sort of example for you, eh, Catherine?"

Mrs Turner kept her eyes on the bead bag she was making, an occupation that certainly necessitated close attention. "Don't you think, Joe . . ." she began, and then stopped, picking up a bead on the point of her needle with a slightly exaggerated intentness.

"No, no, of course not," her brother said. "It was only that I thought, as Arthur's uncle, he might care to know—to hear, that is . . ."

"Oh! rather. I should," Arthur put in, as the sentence failed to get itself completed. "I should be very glad of your advice."

"I was only going to say," his uncle responded, "speaking from my own experience, you know, that the life here, jolly enough as it is in many ways, does not offer much scope for a young fellow with any ambition. There's Hubert, for instance—he's—he's getting lazy—can't blame him; got nothing much to do except play golf—but it's hardly the life one would have chosen for him, eh?"

Arthur smiled. "But I'm not proposing to stay here *permanently*, uncle," he said. "Six months or a year at the outside. I've been having rather a strenuous time you see, and I thought a rest of sorts might do me good."

Joe Kenyon and his sister exchanged a glance that Arthur could not interpret; they might have been recalling some old and rather terrible reminiscence.

"My father said that, did he?" Kenyon said. "Six months or a year at the outside?"

Arthur nodded. He could not possibly tell them why that limit had been assigned.

Mrs Turner sighed and returned to her niggling beads. Her brother leaned back in his chair and blew a cloud of smoke. Arthur longed to warn him that the ash was again in danger of falling.

"I've been here over thirty years," his uncle remarked thoughtfully.

Arthur failed to see the relevance of this statement. "Have you really?" he commented politely.

"And in the first instance," his uncle continued,

"I came back on the understanding that it was to be for twelve months, at the outside. However," he went on more briskly, sitting up and incidentally dropping another large instalment of cigar ash down his shirt front and waistcoat, "that's nothing to do with you; nothing whatever, and I shouldn't like you to be influenced by anything I've said. Your case is entirely different in every way." He had the air of a man who has been tempted into an indiscretion and wanted to cover it without delay.

"Oh, yes! obviously," Arthur agreed.

"You could hardly be called a relation of Mr Kenyon's, could you?" Mrs Turner added, by way of giving point to her brother's retraction of his instance.

"Oh! if I came here, it wouldn't be in any way as a relation," Arthur explained. "I should come as a medical man for—for a certain purpose."

Enlightenment had come to him at last, he believed. These people were jealous of his possible share in the Kenyon fortune. They, too, no doubt knew of that untidy will and its projected supersession; and they were afraid of his having too great an interest in it. They wanted to get rid of him. All this talk of his uncle's had been designed to prevent him from accepting the appointment that had been offered. Arthur blushed with shame at the thought of their suspicion, the more readily in that the anticipation of some legacy had been already in his mind.

"As a matter of fact, I don't think I *shall* stay on here," he said, getting up. He felt that he could not tolerate the company of these two Kenyons for another moment. They were like all rich people, mean and grasping. They had lived in

comfort all their lives and yet hated to part with a single penny. What difference would a few thousands out of the Kenyon fortune make to them?

He looked round for Turner, but he was not to be seen. And then he saw that Eleanor had come in while he had been talking and was sitting alone, reading, on the far side of the room. She looked up at the same moment and let her book fall in her lap, with a gesture that was an invitation to him to join her.

As he crossed the room he reflected that Eleanor at least would give him an unprejudiced opinion. There was something honest and straightforward about her. She was, for instance, utterly unlike Elizabeth.

She rose to meet him, anticipating, it seemed, what he had to say, for before he could speak the polite sentence with which he was prepared, she said,—

"It's rather hot in here to-night, isn't it? Would you care to come out into the garden?"

"Love to," Arthur responded eagerly.

He drew a deep breath of enjoyment as they came out into the open. It was not yet ten o'clock, twilight still lingered in the garden, and the air was sweet with the aftermath of the perfumes that lilac and pinks and honeysuckle had been giving out so generously during the day, and that were now being refined by the fresh, cool scents of the night. To Arthur it seemed that in such a garden as this was attained the ultimate triumph of the liaison between nature and cultivation. Everything that grew here was the result of the sympathetic collaboration between man and the wild, of art using the natural forces of the world itself in the technique of its design. And the design was a



sketch of man's ideal for the perfected earth; the setting for the more orderly, leisured life that he might live when the elemental forces were subdued. After all, riches served a great purpose. Might it not be said that old Mr Kenyon had made a worthy use of his wealth in creating this garden?

"I suppose you want to ask my advice," the clear voice of Eleanor broke in upon his meditations, recalling him rather unpleasantly to the realisation that he had been five minutes before announcing his intention of leaving this pleance in order to take up the primitive struggle with the wild. It was strange how different everything appeared to him out here, away from the influences of that luxurious house and its bored inhabitants. "Yes, I do," he said. "I very much want your advice. Shall we go to that place where you found me with Hubert the day I came? It's sort of shut in, gives one a feeling of seclusion."

She assented quietly, and they descended the shallow steps of the upper terrace in silence, and did not speak again until they were pacing the rectangular lawn of the "cloister."

"Will you let me explain my case to you in the first instance?" Arthur began, and then went on apologetically, "It is frightfully good of you to listen to me at all. I don't know why you should. We've only met once before practically. But you said one or two things on that occasion, didn't you, that made me feel you understand better than any of the others? I can't help guessing in a sort of way that they're rather prejudiced against my accepting the appointment, and I feel that you . . ."

"Why should they be prejudiced?" Eleanor broke in.

Arthur was embarrassed by that direct question. He saw, now, that he had had no right to make any insinuation against the motives of the family to which his companion belonged. For the moment he had been tempted to regard her, also, as being an outsider.

"I didn't mean that," he said; "at least I only meant that they all seem so bound up in a kind of clique, rather suspicious of strangers."

Within that enceinte of box hedges it was too dark now for him to see her face, but the tone of her voice was appreciably colder as she said:—

"And you want to join the clique?"

"No! I don't!" he protested with a touch of temper. "That's what they all seem to think; and as a matter of rather brutal fact, that doesn't tempt me in the very least. I wanted to explain to you, I thought you'd understand, that the only thing that tempts me in the offer your grandfather made me, was the prospect of a little rest and quiet. I feel that I've earned it. I've had my youth stolen from me and I want to get a little of it back—six months or a year isn't too much return to ask surely? And when this miraculous opportunity drops out of the skies, as it were, you want to deny it me. Why? I can understand the others. They've got no imagination. They have always had everything they want and they cannot see what this rest would mean for me. But I thought, I don't know why, that you were different. I didn't expect you to accuse me of wanting to join the clique."

She ignored his reference to herself; taking up a single sentence in his speech by the half-whispered comment: "'They've always had everything they want!' To any one from outside, I suppose they do seem to have had everything."

He overlooked the possible implications of that. "Oh! well; you know what I mean," he said impatiently; "everything that money can buy." He was afraid that she was going, as he put it, to preach.

"But you've evidently made up your mind to stay and have your rest," she replied, going off at another angle. "I can't see why you should bother to ask my advice."

"I haven't made up my mind," he asserted, "and I do want your advice. I only thought you might as well know first just why it tempts me so frightfully to stay."

"And there's Elizabeth," she put in, "you rather like her, don't you?"

"She's quite a jolly girl," Arthur replied coldly.

Jolly? he questioned that the moment he had spoken, but made no effort to retract the adjective. He had an inclination to depreciate Elizabeth now that he was with Eleanor, an inclination that he repressed as being in bad taste, even a trifle vulgar. Nevertheless, he would have liked to make it quite clear that he was not in love with Elizabeth.

When Eleanor spoke again, however, Elizabeth had fallen out of the conversation. "I do see that it looks like hard lines on you," she said more gently; "but as you want to know what I really think, I must tell you. And all that I can say is," she paused, and there was a thrill of passion in her voice as she concluded: "that if I were you I would get away from here, now, at once, to-night . . ."

"But, why?" he protested, half amused at the fantastic suggestion of his leaving Hartling that night. "There must be some reason, I mean, for—well—such an extravagant remedy as that."

"I can't give you any reasons," she said.

He groaned with an intentional effect of exaggeration.

"Have you all got some terrible secret that you're hiding?" he asked. "I assure you one really gets that impression. I had begun to wonder whether perhaps Mr Kenyon was a dangerous lunatic or something, before I saw him this evening. Now, I wonder if he's the only one of you that's perfectly sane. Or is it just this beastly money of yours? Are they afraid up at the house that I want some of it, because if they are you can tell them that I don't. They all seem to think I'm cadging. Hubert began it the first afternoon I was here. I tell you it's simply incomprehensible to me—the whole attitude."

Eleanor did not appear to be in the least offended by this outbreak, but her voice had a new note of agitation in it as she said,—

"Didn't my grandfather offer to do anything for you, when you were talking this evening? Didn't he say anything to you about his will?"

Arthur was glad that she could not see the blush that again burnt his face. "What made you ask that?" he said in what he congratulated himself was a non-committal tone.

"I guessed," she replied quietly. "Was I right?"

"He did mention it," Arthur admitted.

"But that doesn't weigh with you?"

"Not a scrap; not the least little bit in the world."

"Bet it might presently."

"I don't think so."

"Think how you might feel in six months' time," she persisted; "after living here in a sort of luxury, at the prospect of having to rough it again, when by simply going on you might never have to bother

about money any more. Think of the temptation to take life easily, with the probability of having quite enough money to live on when my grandfather dies. And that would always seem to be a possibility only just ahead. He'll be ninety-two in October, you know. Even if you did begin to want work again for its own sake, you'd put off going because it would seem silly to risk losing that legacy just for the sake of staying on for another month or two. Can't you put yourself in that position and see what a temptation it would be?"

Her speech had been delivered in a level, weary voice, the voice of one who speaks out of experience rather than from the stimulus of imagination; and for a moment Arthur was impressed by her earnestness. She was, he supposed, in her modern way, what one called "pious." She believed in the great gospels of work and self-sacrifice. She wanted to save him from the snares of wealth as his own mother had once wanted to save him from the snares of the devil. And just as he had always been tender and forbearing with his mother when she had preached to him of the dangers of the world, so now he must be tender to this preacher of the new gospel of . . . Perhaps she was a Socialist?

"Really, you needn't be afraid," he said gently. "There isn't the least fear of that. As a matter of fact I'm too keen on adventure." (He had told his mother in precisely the same way, he remembered, that he had been too keen on his work to want to go to music-halls.) "Perhaps that's why this offer attracts me so much. It'll be a sort of adventure to stay here for a month or two—a sort of experience anyway. So, honestly, Miss Kenyon, if that's all you've got against it, I don't see why I shouldn't accept. I think, in any event, I shall

tell your grandfather that I couldn't pledge myself in any way; that I could only agree, at the most, to stay for three months."

He heard her sigh deeply, and her reply when it came was unexpected.

"Oh, well," she said, "nothing that any of us could say is likely to make the least difference. He means to have you. I'm going in now, good-night."

She had slipped away into the darkness almost before he was aware of her intention, and he was unable to find her again.

There were still many secrets in that garden which he had not explored, and he caught no glimpse of her as he made his way back to the house.

He was annoyed. He wanted to cross-examine her, make her give him some kind of explanation of her minatory attitude, and especially of that last cryptic speech. What did she mean by saying, "He means to have you?"

There was, certainly, a fairly obvious interpretation, namely that old Mr Kenyon had set his mind on getting his own way in this matter of having a resident medical attendant at Hartling—a perfectly reasonable wish. But she had not meant that, or at least not in a reasonable way.

Was it possible that Eleanor also was poisoned by this degrading love of wealth; that all this talk and admiration for work and independence was nothing more than an assumption to hide her own fear of another rival for her grandfather's testamentary favour? Indeed, was not that the explanation of the pretended secret of Hartling? The explanation was that there was no secret—unless it were that the whole Kenyon family were vultures,

crouched in a horrible group about this one aged man; waiting gluttonously for his death in order to divide the spoil; determined that their share should not be decreased by the addition of a single new member to that gloating circle. That might be called a secret; it was certainly a detestable fact that every one of them would wish to hide.

Arthur straightened his back and lifted his chin with a gesture of disgust, but he no longer felt any desire to leave Hartling. It had come to him that he had an honourable purpose to serve by remaining: he might be a true help and support to the aged head of the house. Old Kenyon was so pitifully isolated from his family. He must always be aware that he was marked down, that the circle of harpies was forever closing more tightly about him, that the only interest that his descendants took in him was in the search for symptoms of his approaching death. He would surely welcome some one coming from the outside, who would have no selfish object in view, who would give him real sympathy and understanding.

Arthur felt a glow of self-satisfaction at the thought. He would make it quite clear, of course, in the coming interview, that no question of any legacy must complicate the arrangement. That should be absolutely definite; and yet—it was just a whimsical fancy, and he shrugged his shoulders—what fun it would be to cut out the rest of the family, to be made one of the principal heirs and disappoint those ghastly birds of prey! Their disappointment would be only momentary. He would take the fortune solely in order to hand it back to them, but in doing that what an admirable lesson he might read them; what contempt he might show

for the pitiful gaud of wealth. (He might possibly retain just enough to give him a small—a very small independent income?)

Above all, he would like to show Eleanor how miserable a vice was this love of money, begetting as it did every kind of sham, insincerity and pretence. In her, at least, the vice could not be deep-seated, and she would be worth saving. She would look back on the worship of riches with horror once she were away from the influence of this house.

He paused on the terrace and looked up at the perpendicular lines of the imitation Tudor facade, dim and impressive in the half-darkness. Yet, the very house itself was a sham, an anachronism. The Tudors had been autocrats and the principles of autocracy were out of date. Even wealth was no longer the power it had once been. The rich were threatened on every side, by taxation from above and the increasing clamour and power of labour from below. They had lost prestige and influence. . . .

Arthur Woodroffe felt remarkably full of vigour that evening, confident in the knowledge of his own abilities, and delightfully aware of his glorious independence. When he reflected on the lives of the Kenyons he at once despised and pitied them for their insane worship of wealth. He thought of them as poor trammelled creatures, as vultures that had lost the power of flight.







## VI

WHEN Arthur had been five weeks at Hartling, he believed that he knew the other inmates of the house as well as he would ever know them, although he had to admit to himself that he knew none of them any better, now, than he had after he had been there three days. His social relations with some of the Kenyons had lost formality. He was familiar in his treatment of Hubert, on terms of impudence with Elizabeth, and of occasional persiflage with Joe Kenyon and Charles Turner. But these intimacies were only such as he might have developed in a month's stay with them at the same hotel. On both sides there was an effect of enforced toleration, of making the best of a casual temporarily unavoidable proximity. He was still some one who had come in from the "outside." The Kenyons never snubbed him, but he could not be quite at his ease with them; he knew that if for any reason he left Hartling, the whole family would become for him the chance acquaintances of a prolonged visit. He could see himself, a few months hence, meeting one of them in the street, pausing to exchange a few conventional inquiries, and passing on with no more than a whimsical smile at a recollection of an old adventure.

There was, however, one exception. If the descendants of old Mr Kenyon had not emerged from the indeterminate background of humanity in general, the old man himself stood out as a distinctive, even a slightly impressive figure. Arthur's original

inclination, to pity the head of the house, had been gradually diverted; he was not on closer acquaintance, a figure that called for pity; and once or twice Arthur had had a strange sensation that was almost akin to fear. There was, indeed, something about old Kenyon that was not quite human, something more than that indescribable appearance of immortal old age. He appeared so intimidatingly detached from the common cares and interests of human life. He had boasted of his power to keep in touch with contemporary movements and affairs, but he was never disturbed by them. Nearly every morning Arthur spent an hour in the old man's company, and in that time he usually discussed the morning's news, but never as yet, had Arthur seen him display the least emotion with regard to any question of politics or finance. He would speak of the Irish situation, the starvation of Austria, the threat of labour troubles, the cost of living, or the burden of the Income Tax as if they were incidents in the reign of George IV. rather than in that of George V. And if Arthur himself gave any sign of heat or partisanship the old man would regard him with the cold speculative eye of one who watches the lives and furies of infusoria under a microscope. He seemed to have completely lost the warm-blooded human passion for interference in other people's affairs.

There was another aspect of him also that was giving Arthur an occasional qualm of uneasiness. He had found that the old man was not dependable in such things as the consideration of one's natural needs in the matter of ready money. In that second interview when Arthur had put his position quite plainly, acknowledged himself willing to accept the post offered him for three months on trial, and

hinted more or less indirectly, but as he believed quite plainly, that he would greatly prefer that there should be no question of any posthumous gratitude, the essential point of present remuneration in the form of salary had not been mentioned. Nor had any reference been made to it since that occasion. And the truth was that Arthur had been spending quite a lot of money in the last five weeks. His original outfit had only been intended to carry him over a glorified week-end, and he had found it necessary to add to it. Also, he had paid his entrance fee, and a year's subscription to the golf club, bought himself some new clubs, a croquet-mallet, a new racket, and a billiard cue, and although he still had a balance at his bank, it had begun to appear rather inadequate when regarded as capital for starting a new life in Canada. The thought of his shrinking resources had begun to embarrass him, but he had felt a strong disinclination to approach the subject in his conversations with Mr Kenyon, moreover, the very fact that he was being paid nothing held a kind of implicit promise that he would be "remembered" later. A man of old Kenyon's wealth and position would not expect a qualified medical man, who was at best quite a distant connection to give his services, to say nothing of his immediate chances, and receive no sort of compensation.

For in the course of those five weeks Arthur had lost some of his scruples with regard to figuring in Mr Kenyon's will. The atmosphere of the house may have had its influence on him. Living, as he presumed he did, among the people who had no other ideal other than that of inheriting as capital what they now enjoyed as interest, he had come by unnoticed degrees to think of that way of life

as being more or less normal and reasonable. And when he thought of the future he had already begun to anticipate the probability of his staying on at Hartling until old Kenyon died.

It was so easy to find reasons for planning that mode of life, so difficult to contemplate any other; more particularly when it seemed probable that only by staying could he hope to be rewarded for his services. He still fidgeted occasionally at the thought that he was wasting his time, perhaps his life; but he was steadily accustoming himself to luxury, and the thought of Peckham grew more and more repulsive every day. He had not written to Bob Somers for nearly a month. He had a definite disinclination even to think of Somers. The life at Hartling was very easy. He was enormously improving his game at golf, croquet, and billiards; and, take it all round, he got on quite well with the family—with all the family—except Eleanor.

For some reason, he and she were still strangers to one another. If there was a barrier between him and the rest of the Kenyons, there was a gulf between him and Eleanor; although, in the first instance, she had seemed to be the only one of them who was prepared to come out and greet him as a friend. But, since he had made his decision to stay on at Hartling for a trial period of three months, there had been little intercourse between them, and never once had he been alone with her. She treated him with a calm aloofness, and he on his side had made no overtures. He supposed that, for some reason she disliked him, and had decided that he, also, disliked her.

The first break in the general stagnation in the Hartling mode of life came with the intrusion of

another member of the family, young Kenyon Turner, the budding stockbroker. He came down for a week-end, and Arthur detested him from the outset.

He had been playing golf with Hubert until six o'clock, and his first sight of the new arrival was in the garden. He was walking up and down the middle of the terrace with Eleanor, deep in what appeared to be a very engrossing conversation. He was an almost deliberately handsome young man, just too well-dressed in Arthur's estimation. His own Conduit Street tailor had never been able to produce that, perhaps too noticeable effect of absolute correctitude. It was probably not the tailor's fault, he was too careless, or the wrong figure or something. And in any case, he despised a man who took too much trouble with his clothes.

He decided on the spur of the moment to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*; an intrusion that young Turner quite obviously resented.

"Been playin' golf?" he asked, with a supercilious air when Eleanor had made the introduction. "Not my game. Don't get enough time for it."

Arthur noted that Turner's eyes were those of a man who was making too great demands on his vitality; tired eyes, shadowed with dark lines, and already thinly creased at the outer corners.

"Good, healthy game," he commented, staring rather contemptuously. "Keeps you in the open air."

"Oh! do you play for medical reasons?" Turner replied. "'Fraid I haven't the determination for that." And as he spoke he turned back to Eleanor intimating as plainly as he could that he had no further use for Arthur's company.

Eleanor's tone had a faint note of apology as

she said: "Kenyon was asking my advice about something."

Arthur could not resist that chance. "You're rather great on giving advice, aren't you?" he asked, and was surprised to see that she winced as if he had hurt her.

"Am I?" was all she said, and Arthur instantly regretted his rudeness.

"I only meant," he began, "that you . . . I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way."

She smiled sadly. "It's an ungrateful task in any case," she said, "and I'm afraid that in this case, too, my advice will not be taken."

Arthur excused himself and went on towards the house, wondering if she were advising young Turner, as she had advised himself, to fly the temptation of Hartling. Why had she done that? He was still unable to find any satisfactory reason for her recommendation of so drastic a course. He could not now believe that she had been jealous of his influence with her grandfather, and the theory that she had conceived so strong an aversion for his personality that she had desired to scare him away, was foolishly improbable. Eleanor was not like that. In some ways he rather admired her. Even Elizabeth always spoke nicely about her.

He was surprised to find an air of disturbance up at the house. Most of the Kenyons were in the drawing-room, but instead of sitting about their familiar occupations, they were gathered together in a group, engaged in what appeared to be a somewhat anxious conference. Their talk ceased abruptly as he came in, and both Mr and Mrs Turner faced round with an expression that was at once expectant and apprehensive. Arthur would have



gone out again at once, but Turner hailed him by saying:—

“Hallo! Arthur. Seen my son anywhere?”

“Yes, he’s on the middle terrace with Eleanor,” Arthur said. “I was just introduced to him, but as they obviously did not want me, I came on up.”

Turner looked at his brother-in-law, Kenyon, who shrugged his shoulders, but made no further comment; and they had returned to their discussion with an effect of rather desperate resignation before Arthur was fairly out of the room.

He wondered if there were some sort of affair, perhaps an engagement, between Eleanor and young Turner; and if the family as a whole objected on account of the nearness of the relationship? He decided that if they consulted him, as they generally did on any matter presumed to be within his province as a medical man, he would make it clear that a marriage of first cousins was not necessarily dangerous. Nevertheless, he despised Eleanor for her choice.

The function of dinner was even more formal than usual that night, and old Mr Kenyon had a prolonged lapse of consciousness that kept them all waiting for more than five minutes. These solemn intervals of suspense always produced in Arthur an effect of being present at some religious observance, and to-night he was more aware of it than usual. He remembered how, as a youth, he had been half-awed and half-exasperated when he attended the Sacrament at home by the ceremonial deliberation of his father. He had had an evangelical tendency, but in this service he had favoured quite an elaborate ritual of his own, and his bearing of the chalice and the paten from the ambry to the

altar, and the subsequent presentation consecration, and personal acceptance of the elements had been conducted in a low, scarcely audible voice, and with an air of almost exaggerated reverence. Once or twice Arthur had sacrilegiously wondered if his father had found an unusual satisfaction in being the sole human instrument and representative of this mystery of the consecration, and had unduly prolonged the periods of silence involved? And to-night, the same thought crossed his mind with regard to old Kenyon. Was he, perhaps, extending the interval of waiting after he had recovered consciousness, exulting in the exercise of his power?

Instinctively Arthur glanced across the table at Eleanor. She was sitting very still, her hands in her lap, her eyes downcast, but he fancied that her expression conveyed something of impatience and revolt. Did she know? he asked himself. Was she inclined to be critical of her grandfather's whims? Was she, perhaps, desperately ready to marry young Turner in order to escape from Hartling?

As soon as the service was released again, he turned for information to Elizabeth.

"Is anything up?" he asked in an undertone. "Anything out of the ordinary?"

She looked at him out of the corners of her eyes and softly blew her relief. "We got a good dose to-night," she whispered, and continued, "That means there's going to be a fuss."

"About young Turner and Eleanor?" he tried.

"Eleanor? Where does Eleanor come in?" was her surprised response.

"I don't know. I thought possibly . . ." He hesitated, finding an unexpected difficulty in putting his guess into words.

"Nothing whatever to do with Eleanor," Elizabeth said, without waiting for him to finish his sentence.

"What is it, then?" he insisted.

"About him," she said, indicating Kenyon Turner. "I can't possibly tell you now."

But after dinner he received enlightenment as to the cause of the impending "fuss" from the prime disturber of the peace himself.

"Care to have a game of pills?" he asked, coming over to Arthur as they were leaving the dining-room.

His first instinct was to refuse. The conceit of the fellow annoyed him—he had two lines of braid down his dress trousers—but Arthur was on the top of his form just then, and was spurred by a desire to beat him at what was, no doubt, his own game. He had been so cursedly supercilious about playing golf for "medical reasons."

"Don't mind," he said in the true Hartling manner of one condescending to a casual visitor from the outside.

But although he did, in fact, beat young Turner, he realised that his victory was due to the fact that his opponent was "off his game," and could probably give him twenty in a hundred on ordinary occasions. Young Turner's touch was almost as delicate as his father's.

"I'm no earthly good to-night," he said, putting down his cue at the conclusion of the game. "All this business is such an infernal worry."

As he spoke he looked at Hubert—who had been exercising his predestinate function of marker—rather than at Arthur.

"You're not the only one," Hubert commented morosely.

Arthur, who had been continuing a break that had not been completed when he reached game, straightened his back and faced his cousin. "What is this business?" he asked.

Hubert, who had got into that uneasy-looking pose of his, looked down at his crossed ankles.

"The old man's so infernally difficult," he said.

"So cursedly tight with the money-bags," Turner explained.

"Have you been trying to milk him, then?" Arthur asked.

"Oh, well! the fact is I'm in a hole, on the rocks," Turner admitted. "I've put it off as long as I can, but something has cursedly well *got* to be done now."

Hubert smiled contemptuously. "*Got* to be done," he repeated. "Who's going to make him? What it'll end in 'll be your coming to live down here!"

"I'm damned if it will," Turner declared vehemently, but there was a note of fear in his voice as he continued: "It's out of the question. I mean I'm not doing so badly at the office and all that. If only the old man allowed me a decent screw, I should be all right. In an office like ours you simply have to be in everything that's going. Sometimes one of the partners 'll put you in to what he thinks is a good thing, for instance, and you're practically bound to have a fiver on. There's a lot of that sort of thing anyhow you can't keep out of."

"And how much notice d'you think the old man'll take of that?" Hubert asked, without looking up.

Turner almost whimpered. "He's *got* to put me right," he protested, "absolutely *got* to."

Hubert rocked silently from foot to foot. "He hasn't," he said quietly, "and you can't make him.

You know that well enough. What did Eleanor say?"

"She promised to do all she could," Turner replied unhelpfully, and added: "I'd sooner emigrate than come to live down here."

"Got the money for your passage?" Hubert inquired.

"I suppose I could get that somehow," Turner said. "Trouble'd be to dodge my creditors. Besides, some of the money must be paid—fellows in the office and so on. I couldn't let them down."

"You'll be living here before you're a week older," Hubert decided. "Safe as houses."

Turner began to pace up and down the billiard room. There was possibly a touch of the histrionic in his manner of doing it, but he was without question genuinely distressed.

"Oh, I'll be double damned if I do!" he repeated. "It's all very well for you—you seem to like this sort of life—but I'd be a raving lunatic in a month. I simply couldn't stand it. I—oh! God! I'll make the old man pay. Why the devil shouldn't he? He's got more money than he knows what to do with."

Hubert was quite unmoved by his cousin's emotion; indeed he seemed to take a melancholy pleasure in watching him. "When are you going to see him?" he asked.

"To-morrow morning," Turner said. "And, by the Lord, if he refuses I'll give him a piece of my mind."

Hubert smiled sadly. "Not you," he commented.

Arthur had not attempted to interrupt this conversation. Once more he had a sense of some curious mystery behind the commonplace situation. Both Hubert's dismal resignation and young Tur-

ner's too violent asseverations hinted at some quality in their grandfather's treatment of them that Arthur found it difficult to associate with the old man himself. It was true, certainly, that he had overlooked or forgotten to offer his medical attendant a salary, but he had none of the signs of the miser. Arthur knew that he gave freely to charities, and spent money without stint on the upkeep of Hartling. And did he not keep his whole family in idleness from one year's end to another?

"Why are you so sure that your grandfather will refuse?" Arthur now broke in, looking at Hubert.

Hubert exchanged a glance with young Turner, and it was the latter who answered.

"He's not sure," he protested. "Anyway, I'm not."

Hubert pursed his mouth and stared thoughtfully at the billiard table.

"Do you think he'll have a down on you for gambling?" Arthur asked.

Turner laughed brusquely. "Well, hardly," he said. "Been a pretty good gambler himself in his day. That was the way he made most of his money. Jolly shady some of his business was too, I've heard. He happened to bring it off, so it was all right. If he hadn't he'd have found himself on the wrong side of the big door."

"You *are* a pretty damned fool, Ken, to talk like that," Hubert put in softly.

"Oh, well! it makes me so *wild*," Turner protested. "You know the whole amount's under fifteen hundred, and what's that to a man worth over half a million? The pater told me this evening that the old chap's worth *all* that. Quite likely a heap more."

Hubert solemnly closed his left eye, and con-

tinued to stare at the billiard table with the other. "If you come to live down here, he'll put you in the will," he remarked.

Turner snorted impatiently. "It isn't *good* enough," he said crossly. "Besides, it's a rotten game waiting for dead men's shoes."

"Specially if you can't damned well help yourself," Hubert agreed, without the least sign of being offended.

Arthur's general perplexity was not enlightened by this conversation, although he had now no further doubts as to the reason for Kenyon Turner's visit. There still remained that old suggestion of something taken for granted, something that was hidden from Arthur himself. The two men had apparently spoken quite frankly before him, and Turner, at least, had verged upon the indiscreet until Hubert had pulled him up. But behind all their talk lay the hint of an assumption that violated Arthur's feeling for common sense. This particular refusal of money could be accounted for. Old Mr Kenyon, if he had been a successful gambler himself, might feel a contempt for the failure, or he might, very reasonably, dislike young Turner. But why should he, in either case, want him to come and live at Hartling? Unless that alternative was being held over him as a kind of threat?

Nor did the temporary solution of the immediate problem elucidate the general situation. Kenyon Turner had his interview with his grandfather on Sunday morning, and left for town half an hour later in the Vauxhall.

Arthur, burning with curiosity, made an opportunity to get Hubert alone after lunch.

"Well, what happened this morning?" he asked.

"Given him a month," Hubert replied.

"How do you mean?" Arthur said.

"Month to think it over," Hubert elaborated. "If he'll chuck the city and come to live down here, the old man'll put him straight."

"And if he won't?"

"Then he can jolly well look out for himself."

"But, good Lord, why does Mr Kenyon want him to come and live here?" Arthur broke out.

"Thinks he'll be company for you and me, perhaps?" Hubert suggested.

"Oh! rot! He must have some reason," Arthur protested.

Hubert scratched his eyebrow.

"Don't you know what it is?" Arthur persisted.

Hubert seemed to purse not only his mouth but his whole face. "Can't say I do," he said, paused, and then continued in another voice: "I'm up against it too. You know Miss Martin, don't you? Didn't you meet her up at the club-house? Well—it's a case with her and me. And what the devil I'm going to do about it, I don't know."







## VII

ARTHUR was instantly aware of a change of relationship between himself and Hubert. His cousin's statement constituted a confidence, the first he had received since he had been at Hartling. And it seemed that the mere offer of such a confidence revealed Hubert in a new light. At the moment he was no longer the "plus three" golfer, or the holder of a sinecure waiting for dead men's shoes, but a man with a personal history; he had ceased to be a type and had become an individual.

Arthur responded without hesitation.

"Does the old man know?" he asked.

"Not yet; I haven't dared to tell him," Hubert said.

"But you think he'll object?"

"Sure to."

"Why. Doesn't he approve of Miss Martin for some reason?" Arthur asked. He remembered her now—a jolly, brown-eyed, brown-haired girl of twenty or so, who had chaffed him for his devotion to golf. "You're all so dreadfully serious over it," she had said, or words to that effect. Odd that she should fall in love with the melancholy Hubert!

"He has never seen her—or heard of her probably," was Hubert's answer.

"But, good Lord, why are you so sure that he'll object then," Arthur said.

"Well, the truth is that we aren't too keen on staying here—afterwards—after we're married, I mean," Hubert admitted.

"And you don't think the old man could do without you?"

"Oh! it isn't that. I don't do anything, really," Hubert said. "Rankin runs the place. I'm only a figurehead."

Arthur had already suspected this fact, but he was surprised to hear his cousin state the case so frankly.

"I thought you seemed to have plenty of time on your hands," he commented.

"Simply nothing to do," Hubert agreed.

"All the same, you know that your grandfather wants to keep you here?"

"He wants to keep us all here, you included," Hubert said.

Arthur knew now that that was true. But this calm acknowledgment of the old man's peculiarity seemed to imply a comprehension of motive that was as yet quite beyond his own understanding.

They had been walking down through the spinney towards the power-house, and Arthur stopped in the quietness of the wood and laid his hand on his cousin's shoulder.

"I say," he said, "I can see that. He *does* want to keep us here. But *why* does he? Do you know? Is there some secret about it?"

"Lord, no—secret? Why should there be?" Hubert returned with perfect candour.

"Seems so damned rum," Arthur said, frowning. "Doesn't it to you?" And then a queer analogy flitted across his mind and he added: "It's like Pharaoh and the Israelites. I never could make out why he wanted to keep them."

"Oh! he's like that, always has been," Hubert replied, ignoring the uncomplimentary parallel. "And he gets worse. He's been frightfully difficult

lately." He paused and warming to a closer confidence, went on, "The devil of it is that you never know what he's really after. If he got into a fearful pad, you'd know where you were, more or less. But he's always as cool as a cucumber. Makes you feel such an infernal ass."

"But suppose," Arthur suggested, "that you simply *didn't* do what he wanted you to? Suppose, for instance, that you stuck it out you were going to marry Miss Martin and be damned to him. What could he do?"

The mere suggestion seemed to make Hubert uneasy. "Couldn't *do* anything in a way," he grumbled. "But—well—no more could I. Her people aren't well off and I simply haven't got a bean of my own."

"You might get a job somewhere else as an estate agent?" Arthur put in.

Hubert shook his head. "Those jobs are jolly hard to get," he said. "I have thought about it. But I've had no experience really, not to count. And naturally I shouldn't get any testimonial from the old man, if I chucked this. Rankin would have ten times the chance I've got of a job like that, and you should hear him let himself go when he gets cold feet about anything. He's got five kids, you know, and he'd do any mortal thing not to offend the old man. And then, of course, he guesses that he's down for a bit in the will. They all do—all the servants, I mean. They're all hanging on on low wages." He gave a little bark of laughter as he concluded: "Like the rest of us."

"Rotten," Arthur agreed sympathetically. He had begun to like Hubert. It was not his fault that he had no backbone. He had never had a chance to develop one. And this affair with the

jolly Miss Martin was quite the worst kind of luck.

They were still standing in the spinney wrapped about by the peace of the Sunday afternoon. It was a dull, windless day, threatening rain; and the very sounds of the wood served to emphasise the repose of humanity. The wheel at the generating station was not working, and except for the distant splash of the overfall and the faint humming of undistinguishable insects, the whole of Hartling seemed to be plunged in sleep.

Hubert took his cousin's arm and they walked on slowly toward the power-house.

"I expect you'll think it perfectly rotten of me to ask," he said in a low confidential voice; "but—you don't think there is any chance of his breaking up, do you?"

Arthur sincerely wished at the moment that he could give an encouraging reply, but he could find none.

"Don't see any signs of it," he said almost apologetically. "He's tremendously sound, lungs and heart and so on."

"But what about those fits of his?" Hubert asked.

"Well, I'm not sure," Arthur said. "They're a bit hard to diagnose. But I'm pretty sure they're not a sign of impending death."

"And he might go on like he is—perhaps for years."

Arthur hesitated. Desire was urging his thought, but he believed that he was giving a carefully weighed opinion when he replied: "Well, it wouldn't surprise me, as a matter of fact, if he went to pieces all at once. Physically, I can't find anything the matter with him, but I've never made a thorough examination. And, in a case like his, there's much more than the actual physical condition of the

principal organs to be considered. I've wondered if he isn't held up, in a way, by his will-power. He keeps himself so aloof—if you know what I mean? Never lets himself get excited about any mortal thing; hardly seems interested, really . . .”

“Well, but is there any reason why he shouldn't go on holding himself up?” Hubert inquired, as Arthur paused.

“It might break him down if he were badly crossed,” Arthur said.

They walked on in silence for a few yards, pondering the significance of that last pronouncement before Hubert said,——

“Couldn't do that, though, not on purpose. Be pretty much like murder, wouldn't it?”

“Pretty much,” Arthur agreed. “And anyway, it's pure speculation on my part.”

“I can't afford to cross him,” Hubert went on, as though he had finally dismissed the thought of his cousin's speculations in pathology. “I expect you'll think I'm jolly soft, but I couldn't face being chucked out of here without a penny and no prospect of getting a job.”

“But surely Uncle Joe would help you,” Arthur put in.

“The pater! Good Lord! what could *he* do?” Hubert said. “He hasn't got a red cent of his own. I don't suppose he could lay his hands on a fiver to save his life.”

Once or twice in the course of the last few weeks Arthur had had a faint suspicion that ready money was rather scarce among the Kenyons, but he was shocked by this plain statement.

“Doesn't the old man allow them anything?” he asked.

“Not a bean—in cash,” Hubert said. “Of course

we can get anything we want in reason, but the old man pays all the bills. He isn't a bit mean that way. Never grumbles. Draws the line at jewellery, though, as you've probably noticed."

Arthur had not noticed that omission, but he instantly remembered it, and he saw now that the absence of jewellery gave some air of distinction to the Kenyon women. He approved the old man's taste in this particular. He hated to see women smothered in diamonds.

"Why's that?" he asked, passing by the admission of his failure to observe the phenomenon.

"Hates jewellery; always has," Hubert explained. "One of his fads. Says he'd as soon see women wear a ring in their nose as in their ears."

Arthur nodded. He had no inclination to enter into any discussion of the æsthetic value of jewellery as an aid to the enhancing of woman's beauty. And he was intrigued for the moment by the new aspect of Hartling that Hubert's confidences had unexpectedly revealed to him. The Kenyons seemed to be living a sort of communistic life, he reflected. They had goods, everything they wanted in reason, but no money. Well, it was an easy life—for the elderly and middle-aged. They had no responsibilities, no anxieties. He could understand now why they had all got into such slack habits. After all, why shouldn't they? They had no incentive to do anything but what they were doing. Indeed, it seemed that they had no power to alter their way of life. They were the slaves of a benevolent autocrat who demanded no service from them except respect. Hartling was a Utopia, a Thelema in which there was no necessity for work; and one soon forgot that it was also a prison.



He realised at the same time that he might have drawn these inferences for himself, and was slightly annoyed with his own obtuseness. He was, he thought, too much inclined to take things for granted. He had come down to Hartling with ready-made opinions and formal judgments. He had certainly been far too willing to judge the Kenyons, without knowing any of the facts of the case. But he condemned them no longer. It is true that they were not, as Eleanor might say, doing any good in the world, but they were no worse in that respect than the majority of rich people, and the Kenyons had the valid excuse that they could not help themselves.

Abruptly his thoughts returned to Hubert's troubles.

"I'll admit it's rotten luck about Miss Martin," he said, as if he were continuing their conversation. "But you do get a good time down here."

"If I'd the money to emigrate and she'd come with me, I'd go to-morrow," Hubert said, "and be damned to the good time."

Hubert was in love, Arthur reflected. Also, he had never known any other condition and could not realise the horrible realities of dirt and disease.

"Feel a bit uplifted, I expect, just now," he remarked casually.

Hubert stopped and faced him. "Do I look uplifted?" he asked.

He certainly did not. He had an air of settled melancholy at the best of times, and at this moment he had apparently abandoned himself to the deepest gloom.

Five weeks earlier Arthur would have advised his cousin to take his courage in his hands and

break away from Hartling at any cost—even as Eleanor had once advised himself—but now he could appreciate to the full Hubert's difficulty.

And then it occurred to him that he had still just enough money to solve the present problem. If that expression of the wish to emigrate had been sincere, he might free his cousin by offering him the loan of, say two hundred pounds. It would, in any case, be interesting to see whether or not he would accept the chance if it were given to him. But he knew, even as the will to help Hubert rose up in him, that he was afraid.

Old Kenyon would surely find out who had advanced that money and then he would . . . Arthur was not quite sure what he would do, but he feared the consequences. He might be turned out of Hartling; he would certainly lose any hope of that future remuneration for which he was now working.

The thought of making an offer flashed through his mind and was rejected. He must, at least, have his three months.

"Oh! cheer up, old man," he advised the gloomy Hubert with an assumption of hopefulness. "Things are never as bad as you think they're going to be. Something will happen, right enough."

"There's only one thing that'll help me," Hubert muttered, as they once more continued their walk.

"And that's bound to happen sooner or later," Arthur returned. "I dare say you won't have to wait much longer."

Hubert gave a little snort of impatience. "Jolly fine," he said; "but the pater, for instance, has been practically waiting all his life."

Arthur was stirred to candour. "In a way," he said, "but I don't suppose it has worried him much."

"Hasn't it? You ask him," retorted Hubert.

Arthur thought over that for a moment before he said, "If I did, he probably wouldn't tell me. You're a secretive lot down here, you know. You're absolutely the first person who has given me any sort of confidence."

"We can't," Hubert replied. "It isn't safe. You never know what the old man'll find out—he's damnably sharp in some things, and he's got us all as tight as wax. If he chose to cut up rough, he could turn any of us out of here without a blessed penny. I don't suppose he'd like it, for instance, if he knew that I was talking like this to you. But—I don't know—I wanted to tell you, and that affair of Ken's makes you think a bit, doesn't it? He's in a cleft stick all right now—like the rest of us."

Arthur had a memory of his first night at Hartling, and of the way in which his uncle had suddenly dropped out of the conversation after his father had, with apparent gentleness, expressed surprise that his son did not go to live in Italy. Was it possible that that quiet expression veiled a threat?

"But the old man's a good sort, surely," Arthur protested. "He wouldn't do anything absolutely rotten, I mean."

"You never know what he'll do," Hubert said. "You ask the pater about Uncle Jim, Eleanor's father. I don't suppose he'd mind telling you. You're practically one of us now, aren't you?"

But some spirit in Arthur rebelled furiously against that suggestion.

"Good Lord, no; not in that way," he asserted vigorously. "I'm perfectly free to go whenever I want to. Even if I haven't got a cent, I could always get a job as a doctor."

"Yes, you score there," Hubert agreed, without enthusiasm. "Wish to God I'd got a profession."

Their conversation was interrupted at this point by their arrival at the little power-house in which Scurr, the engineer-chauffeur, was busily engaged on a minor repair to one of the temporarily dismantled dynamos. And as they returned to the house half an hour later, Arthur determinedly discussed certain alterations the Committee were proposing in connection with the thirteenth and fourteenth holes of the golf course. He had definitely quashed the assertion that he was now to be numbered among those who were waiting for a certain long deferred event, and chose to think no more about that subject at present. He was, as he had asserted, free to leave Hartling whenever he wished. He was not tied in any way, he never could be. And there was no reason why he should not enjoy his three months' holiday. He was sorry for Hubert, but if he had that £200, he probably would not dare to break away. It would not be worth while for one thing, and for another he was too "soft," spoilt by the ease of a luxurious life.

And Hubert, on his side, made but one further reference to his love affair. No doubt he was afraid that he had already been rather indiscreet, for just before they reached the house he said,—

"Absolutely between you and me, of course, what I told you this afternoon."

"Rather. Absolutely," Arthur assured him.

It was impossible not to have a slight feeling of contempt for them all, Arthur thought, even though he had begun to pity them. Congratulating himself anew on his own magnificent independence, he was inclined, just then, to regard the Kenyons as parasitic, bloodless creatures. He had once pic-

tured them as vultures; now he saw them rather as jackals.

After dinner that evening, however, he was influenced to modify once again the continually fluctuating impression he received of the Hartling household. He was warm with the comfort of good food and good wine, and inclined to be generous and a trifle sentimental when this new record was laid before him.

His uncle apparently knew something of the confidences his son had given that afternoon, for it was with a new, a more intimate manner that he came across to Arthur in the drawing-room after dinner.

"Having your usual game to-night?" he asked.

"Oh! I don't know. Why?" Arthur said. Of all the Kenyons, his uncle was, he considered, the most to be despised. He was so confounded sloppy.

Joe Kenyon made a vague gesture with the hand that held his cigar and the long ash fell and broke on the carpet. He frowned impatiently, looked down at the ash and apparently decided to forget it.

"Didn't know if you'd come for a stroll in the garden," he said.

"Right you are. Come along," Arthur agreed, in a spasm of pity for the futility of the man.

The Kenyons always sought the garden if they had anything of the least importance to say, and he inferred that his uncle had some admission to make now concerning Hubert's unfortunate engagement. Was it possible that they wanted him to be a sort of intermediary between them and the old man?

But when they were in the garden and out of earshot of the house, Mr Kenyon displayed no immediate anxiety to discuss his son's affairs,

Instead of that he began to give Arthur what seemed to be rather paternal advice.

"Can't think why you go off to the billiard-room directly after dinner," he said, "when you've got this. Billiards are all right after dark, but you miss the best hour of daylight going in there at nine o'clock this time o' year."

"Well, I'm out of doors all day," was Arthur's excuse.

"Playing golf or croquet or tennis," his uncle commented.

Arthur was startled. This was the last quarter from which he had expected a criticism of his way of life.

"Didn't know you objected to games," he said curtly.

Joe Kenyon did not appear to hear that. The gray sky of the afternoon had broken, the sun was setting among a tangled mass of cloud, and he was watching the spectacle with the entranced eyes of a dreamer.

"I'll admit," he murmured half apologetically, "that it's a trifle too dramatic. But at my age one wants the broad effects. However, I suppose you don't *see* these things."

Arthur turned his attention to the sunset. "Looks uncommonly like rain," he said.

His uncle laughed. "We all have our different compensations," he said. "Yours is games and mine the ability to see things. However, I don't know what we should do without 'em."

"Compensations?" Arthur repeated. "I don't know that I'd thought of games in that light."

"You will in time, if you stay here," was his uncle's answer, given a little sadly.

"But I don't mean to," Arthur asserted.

Joe Kenyon turned reluctantly from the contemplation of the sunset and looked at his nephew. "Then you'd better break away while you have the chance," he said. "I'm a fool to say this to you, but Hubert told me of your talk this afternoon, and I—well, I'm sorry for you."

Arthur raised his eyebrows.

"You're getting drawn in, though you mayn't know it," his uncle continued, "and if you do your life will be wasted. You'll be sucked dry like the rest of us. Damn it, I can't say more than that. I shouldn't have said as much if you hadn't been so decent to Hubert this afternoon."

Arthur's conscience pricked him, and at the same moment he had a warm sense of friendship for his cousin. "Did he tell you that?" he said. "I'm glad he thought so anyhow. I thought I'd been rather rotten to him as a matter of fact."

"I gathered that you'd been very friendly," Joe Kenyon replied, his attention returning to the sunset. "Not that you can be of any help in his case."

"I don't know, I might," Arthur blurted out on the impulse of the moment. "Look here, I've got a couple of hundred pounds he's welcome to, if he'd care to have it. He said something about trying his luck in Canada if he could raise the money."

His uncle made no answer for a few seconds, then he definitely resigned himself to the loss of the sunset, drew his nephew's arm through his own, and began to walk slowly up and down the length of the broad gravel walk upon which they had been standing.

"Good of you, Arthur, very good and generous of you," he said; "but it's no use. Hubert's in love and he's a bit above himself, but he'd never do anything in Canada. He's too soft and ignorant. We

only guess what the world's like outside this place, but the things we do guess don't tempt us to explore it." He paused a moment before he continued: "We don't talk about ourselves, of course, but you must know the truth pretty well by this time—besides, you're practically one of us now."

Arthur was keenly interested. "I'm not sure that I do know the truth, Uncle Joe," he said. "Except—well, Hubert told me this afternoon that your father—er—keeps you pretty short of cash and so on; makes it jolly difficult for you to sort of—well—break away."

Joe Kenyon smiled grimly. "Difficult!" he repeated, and then, "I suppose you haven't got a cigar on you? All right, never mind. I smoke too much: that's another compensation."

"Couldn't you tell me how things are, a bit more?" Arthur ventured. "You know I might be able to help."

"It isn't easy to tell you, you see," Joe Kenyon said, after a short pause. "Let's sit down. But . . ." he hesitated, grunting and sighing, before he blurted out, "But you might just run up to the house and get me a couple of cigars, there's a good fellow. Then, I'll—I'll tell you a story. Only you needn't, that is, I shouldn't say anything to the others about our being down here."

While his uncle had been talking Arthur's heart had warmed to him, but in the ten minutes that now intervened while he went to the house for the cigars, he had a brief reaction. As he entered the house, the habit of mind that had been growing upon him for the past five weeks strangely reasserted itself. He was aware again of the futility and weakness of the Kenyons, their laziness, their self-indulgence,



and what he could only regard as the meanness of their attitude towards the expected inheritance.

And his uncle seemed to be the very type of all these aspects of the family—a man so idle and weak that he could not exist without his cigar for half an hour. He might have endless excuses, but there must be a horribly lax strain in him somewhere. He was afraid even of his own sisters and his brother-in-law. He had not wanted them to know where he was and what he was saying.

In deference to that wish, however, Arthur went to the smoking-room for the desired cigars—a room that was used as a store and in which no one ever sat. There was more or less realisable wealth there, he reflected, as he opened a box of his uncle's cigars.

Why, these cigars must have cost over five pounds a hundred before the war.

He was crossing the hall on his return to the garden, when the drawing-room door opened and Miss Kenyon came out. Arthur had a feeling that she had deliberately tried to catch him. He had always disliked and rather feared her. She was different from the other Kenyons, more decided and more efficient. He had not modified his original opinion of her as a hard woman.

"Going out?" she asked coldly.

"Yes; it's jolly in the garden," Arthur said.

"Is my brother out there?" she continued.

Arthur hesitated on the edge of an implied untruth, but she gave him no opportunity to prevaricate, adding almost immediately,—

"I wish you would tell him I want to speak to him."

"I will, if I can find him," Arthur said.

"Oh! You'll know where to find him," Miss Kenyon replied, and re-entered the drawing-room.

It was almost certain, then, Arthur reflected, that she had heard him and had come out to give him that message. She had probably seen him coming up the garden, and had some purpose in putting an end to his conversation with her brother. He was annoyed by the interruption. He felt bound now to deliver her message and had no doubt that it would put an end to his uncle's confidences.

"I met Miss Kenyon in the hall as I was coming out," he said, as he rejoined his uncle. "At least, I think she must have seen me coming up from the drawing-room window. She came out and told me to tell you that she wanted to speak to you, and went back again."

Joe Kenyon was leaning back in one of the comfortable wicker chairs that were scattered about the garden, and gave no sign of being perturbed by the message.

"Got the cigars?" he asked, stretching out his hand, and then after an interval in the course of which he had got the cigar satisfactorily going, he went on: "Esther's so cautious. She thinks I'm indiscreet. Perhaps I am, but I can't really see what difference it can make, so long as we don't say anything against the old man. And in any case, I trust you, Arthur. I can trust you, can't I?"

There was a wistful note in the last sentence that robbed it of any offence, and Arthur was touched by it. The effect of his brief visit to the house was being dissipated already by the surroundings of the garden.

"Rather. Yes, absolutely," he said gently. "I mean what possible reason could I have for giving you away?"

Joe Kenyon sighed. "Reason?" he reflected. "Well, reason enough in all conscience."

Arthur was puzzled. "What?" he asked.

"Oh! there you are," his uncle replied. "Either you know too little or too much, and one has to trust you in either case. But surely, my dear boy, you can at least see that you've got it in your power to give any of us away to the old man?"

"Oh, good Lord!" Arthur ejaculated in an undertone. He had a horrible picture of the Kenyons living a life of eternal suspicion and distrust, fearing that one or other of them might by some trick or disloyalty obtain an unfair hold on the old man's affection. His uncle's next speech, however, destroyed that picture even as it began to take shape.

"That doesn't apply to us, of course," he said. "We've got a sort of unspoken agreement between ourselves. Had to have. We *hadn't* at first though, you know," he continued, looking round and changing his voice as if he were making an unexpected announcement.

"Hadn't you?" Arthur murmured encouragingly.

"By Jove, no," his uncle went on reminiscently. "But that was nearly forty years ago, of course; just after this place was built; at the time when I tried to break away." He paused a moment and then went on: "I wanted to be an artist. I've got portfolios of stuff upstairs if you'd ever care to look at 'em. I dare say I shouldn't have been any good, not really first-class, but I can see things, and now and again I can get something down. There was a note of the wood I made when we first came here, that was rather good. I'll show it to you sometime. The wood was pretty nearly all pines then. The old man planted those larches—said the pines were too gloomy. I dare say he was right."

"And he wouldn't let you become an artist?" Arthur put in.

"He didn't actually forbid it," Joe Kenyon said. "But he made it simply impossible. He—well"—he lowered his tone almost to a whisper—"we used to believe in those days that he had some insidious disease or other. I suppose he must have started the idea himself. I can't remember. But I know that my poor mother used to be very depressed about it at times. She died in '83, you know, a year or two after we came here to live. However, what with one thing and another, there seemed to be no alternative except to put off my going to Paris—from month to month at first, and afterwards from year to year." He gave a grim laugh as he added. "In a way of speaking you may say it's going on still. Not long ago at dinner I was talking about Italy and the old man asked me why I didn't go there."

"Yes, it was after I came. I heard him," Arthur said. "But—I didn't understand . . ."

"Oh, well! if I'd said I would, I shouldn't have got the money to go with in the first place," his uncle explained, "and in the second it would have been all up with me so far as the old man's will was concerned. He never threatens one, not directly, but we *know*. And, well, I can't face the thought of the workhouse. They don't allow you cigars there, I'm told," he concluded whimsically.

Arthur thought that he could realise the old situation fairly accurately. His uncle's original weakness showed so clearly through his narration. He had, no doubt, procrastinated, and bargained with himself, continually shirking the immediate necessity to take definite action. All that side of the affair was comprehensible enough, but what of that other point from which the narrative had so casually rambled away?

"Yes, I see," Arthur agreed sympathetically; "but what was it you were going to say about your having some agreement among yourselves, uncle? It was apropos of my being an outsider, you know."

"We got to understand it wouldn't do, that's all," Joe Kenyon said, "not to quarrel among ourselves, that is. Esther was inclined to make mischief in the old days. I don't know whether I ought to be telling you all this. Anyhow, we soon saw that it would never do for us to be jealous of one another. We had to find a *modus vivendi* and—and take our chance. That was after Catherine married Charles and they had come to live with us. The idea at that time was that Charles was going into the Diplomatic later on."

Kenyon paused, but made no movement to rise and go up to the house in obedience to his sister's summons. His next sentence, however, apparently referred to that issue.

"Seems to me," he said, "that there can't be any harm, now, in telling you these things. I don't mind admitting that we've discussed it among ourselves—Esther, Catherine, Charles, and myself, that is. Of course what Esther says is that you might go behind us, as it were, but I know there's no sort of fear of that."

Arthur had never liked Miss Kenyon; but now he began quite actively to hate her.

"She must have a disgustingly low opinion of me if she could think a thing like that," he said bitterly.

"Oh, well," his uncle replied calmly, "you get like that when you've lived here long enough. Can't trust any one from outside. Never know, that after all these years, we mayn't be left in the lurch. But, as I've pointed out to 'em, you're different."

Nevertheless he was, without doubt, distinctly uneasy. He knew that he had been indiscreet, and now was anxious for reassurance. Twice in the last minute he had ended with an assertion of belief in his nephew's trustworthiness.

And it was with a strong feeling of desire to confirm that belief both for his uncle's sake and his own, that Arthur now said,—

"I wish I could do something to help—to help Hubert, I mean. Don't you think I might say something to Mr Kenyon about it? Reason with him? I wouldn't mind doing it in the least. He always seems reasonable enough when we're talking together. A bit hard, perhaps, rather—what shall I say?—not really interested in life, and so on; but not a bit—well—unkind—cruel, if you know what I mean?"

He had expected an almost scornful refusal of his offer to act as an intermediary, but his uncle appeared ready, at least to consider the proposal.

"That's good of you, Arthur," he said, "but there's another thing to be thought of, too; Esther's dead against the engagement."

That announcement instantly stiffened Arthur in his resolve. The thing was worth doing in any case, but the possibility of inflicting defeat upon Miss Kenyon afforded an immense additional inducement.

"I'd like to do it," he said, with sudden ardour.

Joe Kenyon sat up in his chair and turned to face his nephew with an effect of new interest.

"I don't for a moment believe your embassy will make the least difference, my dear boy," he said earnestly; "but I, personally, should be grateful if you'd undertake it. For Hubert's sake. It would be a—a tremendous compensation for him if he were married, and—well, we don't know yet that

the old man will oppose the idea. At the same time I suppose you realise what it may mean for you?"

"Mean? Yes. Well, I suppose. . . ." Arthur began, uncertain of his uncle's precise intention.

"Mean that you may be turned out of the place at an hour's notice," Joe Kenyon interrupted him. "If you get on the old man's wrong side he'll have no scruples. That's what happened with my brother James, Eleanor's father, you know. He wanted to marry a girl, such a charming girl she was too—Eleanor takes after her—and somehow or other he put the old man's back up. Poor old Jim, he had an awful time—married Eleanor—Eleanor's mother, you understand—out of hand, and they practically starved. He used to write, but we couldn't help him, of course not to count; and the old man wouldn't. He was as hard as nails—hard as nails. They were in South America somewhere, Rio, I think it was, when Jim's wife died, and he only survived her about six months. We heard all about it from a fellow called Payne and his wife. Payne was in the Cable Company out there, and Jim knew them and asked them to bring Eleanor home. She was only seven or eight then, a dark, solemn little chit as ever you saw, poor dear. By God! you could tell she'd been through it. I can see them all standing in the hall now. Payne was a great stout chap with a grayish beard. His wife was a big woman too. They had Lord knows how many children of their own, I believe. And that little solemn elf Eleanor looked like a midget beside them. Thin as a herring she was, but as pretty as a fairy. She was always graceful, even as a bit of a child—sure in her movements—it was a pleasure to watch her. . . ."

Joe Kenyon paused as if savouring his recollec-

tion, taking reflective pride, perhaps, in his power of "seeing," and then continued with a chuckle, "And this chap Payne was all taken aback. He hadn't expected a place like this evidently. Jim hadn't told him anything, I suppose, and Payne probably thought we weren't much better off than Jim. He put it in a bit thick, I remember, about Jim's poverty over there. Nice, decent sort of people. We heard from 'em once or twice afterwards, inquiring after Eleanor, and then they went back to South America and we lost touch with them; though I believe Eleanor still hears from them occasionally. However, what I was going to say was that we didn't know, of course, whether the old man would have Eleanor or not. Esther wouldn't have anything to do with it, so in the end your aunt and I took Eleanor up to show her to the old man, and as luck would have it he took a tremendous fancy to her. She's been his favourite ever since." He hesitated a moment before he added: "But there's never been any question of our being jealous of her, of course. She has told us that if by any chance the old man left her the bulk of his property, she wouldn't keep it. She wouldn't, either. In fact I shouldn't be at all sorry if it was that way. You could trust Eleanor to be absolutely fair—and generous."

Joe Kenyon stopped speaking, but for a time Arthur made no comment on the story he had just heard. His attention seemed to be following two strands at the same moment. One side of his mind was attempting to weigh his uncle's motives in making all these confidences. Had he and his sister been quarrelling? There had been more than one reference to Miss Kenyon that had sounded distinctly bitter, and the emphasis he had laid on his



last sentence might have implied that he hoped that if in some moment of aberration his father made an unjust will, he might be at the mercy of Eleanor rather than be dependent on the goodwill of his sister.

The other side of Arthur's mind was engaged in the contemplation of a desolate little fairy standing in the hall of Hartling House solemnly awaiting her fate. Even now, she had sometimes a look of desolation, of loneliness. He wondered if she still remembered her early troubles, if she occasionally grieved for her father and mother?

"I hope I haven't bored you with all this?" his uncle's voice murmured. "It is—to tell you the truth—a relief to let oneself go a little to some one who doesn't know. I dare say you can't understand that?"

"I can. Rather," Arthur said, suddenly appreciating the fact that his uncle's motive was the purely personal one of relief. "I can quite understand now you must get fed up with all this sometimes."

Joe Kenyon sighed, but he did not otherwise comment on this expression of sympathy. "I've been yarning so, we've got rather away from the point," he said. "But you know, Arthur, I don't want you to go into this affair of Hubert's without knowing what you are doing. There it is, my boy. You may be cutting your own throat. I assure you the old man will put you out at an hour's notice if you happen to get on his wrong side."

"Honestly, uncle, I don't care a little hang about that," Arthur affirmed bravely. "I never meant to stay here and I've had a jolly six weeks."

"Of course we shall have to say something to Esther first," his uncle replied.

"Oh, of course," Arthur agreed readily, but for a moment his heart sank. Miss Kenyon's influence was probably very considerable, he reflected. A few minutes earlier he had been eager to come to a clash of wills with her. He was still ready to do that. But it might be that, even if he defeated her in this, she would work against him afterwards, and that he would have to leave Hartling. And when he faced that possibility he was sure that, after all, he did not want to go. The world outside was an uncomfortable, unprotected place, in which there would be no luxuries for him, and he would have to work very hard in uncongenial circumstances in order to make a bare living. Also, he would be sorry to go now that he was just beginning to know these relations of his a little better. Hubert was a good chap, and so was Uncle Joe. He had not properly understood them until to-day. And now that he knew her story, he would like to know something more of Eleanor. There was something fine about her, and the thought of that "dark, solemn little chit" in the hall made him feel oddly tender towards her.

The darkness had fallen, and the clouds had re-assembled in tremendous masses that were moving with strange swiftness across the sky. Leaning back and looking upward it was interesting to contrast the windless quiet of the garden in which they were sitting with the evidences of the tumult above.

"It's beginning to rain," his uncle suddenly exclaimed, breaking a long silence. "We'd better go

Arthur was prepared for some display of temper on the part of Miss Kenyon when he and his uncle entered the drawing-room, and was disappointed

to find that she displayed her habitual air of cold reserve. He was a trifle nervous and apprehensive now, about this projected embassy of his, and would have been glad to have been stiffened by some show of active opposition. Miss Kenyon had, he thought, something of the same awful detachment that her father exhibited towards every-day affairs. All the older members of the party were there. Turner had a novel in his hand, the three women were busy with their usual fancy-work, but to-night they had drawn together in a group by one of the windows, with an effect of being in conference.

Joe Kenyon's action in pulling up a chair and joining the group held a faint suggestion of bravado. He had the uneasy air of a man coming to a confession of his own weakness.

Arthur preferred to stand, leaning against the jamb of the window. It gave him a physical sense of superiority to look down upon his antagonist.

Joe Kenyon plunged at once into what Arthur judged to be relatively a side issue. "Arthur and I have been talking about Hubert's engagement," he said. "Hubert had been telling him all about it this afternoon; and Arthur has suggested that he should say something to my father."

If he had deliberately intended an effect of surprise he had attained his object. They were undoubtedly startled by this announcement, and not less obviously puzzled. It was not, however, Arthur's part in the affair that seemed to perplex them. None of them looked up at him, they were all staring at Joe Kenyon, with an expression that seemed, Arthur thought, to be seeking for a private sign. But so far as he could see, none was given. Joe Kenyon was leaning back in his chair and wiping his forehead. "This rain ought to cool the air

a bit," he interjected in an undertone. "Beastly hot in here."

"Very friendly of Arthur," Turner commented, turning slightly towards the young man as he spoke. "No reason, after all, why he should bother himself about our affairs."

"I suppose he understands . . ." his wife began, and then stopped abruptly. She was still looking anxiously at her brother as if inviting further confidences.

Joe Kenyon nodded. "Oh, of course, of course," he said. "Hubert told him all about it this afternoon."

"About what, Joe?" Miss Kenyon put in, speaking for the first time. She gave him no indication of perturbation or anxiousness, but she was reading her brother's face as if she sought some evidence of his secret motive.

"Well, about the engagement, and having no money and so on," Joe Kenyon rather desperately explained.

"No money?" his sister returned, with a lift of her eyebrows. "What do you mean, by having no money?"

"Well, Hubert hasn't any, not of his own," her brother replied. "And he was saying, I gather, that he would like—well—a change of air if he were married. About enough of us here, without him, perhaps. That sort of thing. And Arthur very generously offered through me to lend him a couple of hundred pounds if he wanted it."

Whether or not he had intended to create a diversion by this further announcement, he had certainly achieved that object.

Turner gave an exclamation of surprise, but it was Mrs Kenyon who answered.

"Oh, but we couldn't *possibly* accept that," in an agitated voice; and Arthur, looking down, saw that her hands were trembling. She was, he realised then, by far the most nervous of the five, and he recognised in her at that moment a strong likeness to his own mother. She, too, had been a timid woman, apprehensive not only of danger, but also of change. Miss Kenyon had let her work fall in her lap, and was sitting, plunged, apparently, in a fit of deep abstraction.

"No, no, of course not," Joe Kenyon replied. "I have already refused that."

"On what grounds?" Miss Kenyon put in sharply.

"Er—I don't think—I suggested, Esther, that Hubert would be—well, rather lost if he were to find himself in a new country with a wife to support on a capital of £200."

Miss Kenyon gave a short impatient sniff, and turned to Arthur. "A little strange, isn't it," she asked, "for you to offer to finance us?"

"Only Hubert, you know," Arthur explained.

"Hubert has a father and mother alive, to say nothing of uncles and aunts," she returned. "I don't know why he should need help from a comparative stranger."

"He seemed to need it," Arthur said dryly, "or I shouldn't have made the offer."

Miss Kenyon shrugged her shoulders and turned back to her brother. "Are we to understand, Joe," she said, "that Arthur Woodroffe knows all about us now? Have you told him everything?"

"Damn it, Esther, what do you mean by everything?" Joe Kenyon exploded defensively. "I—it seems to me—Hubert had pretty well told him all that mattered, before I said a word. I told him about Jim, if that's what you mean?"

Miss Kenyon began to drum her fingers on the arm of her chair. "And what good do you expect to do to yourself or anybody else by speaking to my father about Hubert's engagement?" she asked Arthur.

Turner leant back in his chair and crossed his legs. "Precisely, that's the real point," he agreed.

"Well, naturally, I hope to persuade Mr Kenyon to sanction the engagement," Arthur said.

"Why?" snapped Miss Kenyon.

"Friendship for Hubert," Arthur said.

"I wasn't aware that you and he were such great friends," was Miss Kenyon's criticism of that explanation.

"Oh, well, pretty fair," Arthur compromised. "Anyhow, I'll be glad to help him if I can."

"I can't imagine that anything you could say to my father would carry the least weight," Miss Kenyon said dryly.

"Perhaps not," Arthur agreed. "No harm in trying, though, is there?"

"I think that's quite true, you know, Esther," Mrs Kenyon put in, "and it would be rather a relief if—that is, I hope, for Hubert's sake at all events, something can be done to smooth things over."

Miss Kenyon turned from her sister-in-law with a slight suggestion of contempt. "Do you know this girl, Dorothy Martin?" she asked, looking at her brother.

"Slightly," he said. "Met her twice, I think. Seemed a jolly girl, I thought. Full of life."

"Quite a nice girl," his wife put in eagerly.

"Oh! you've met her too, have you?" Miss Kenyon commented coldly.

"At the Club House. Hubert took me up there

to tea, the day before yesterday, on purpose to introduce me," Mrs Kenyon explained, with a pathetic air of apology.

Arthur had drawn many false inferences about the affairs at Hartling, but it was quite clear to him now that although there might, as his uncle had said, be some tacit agreement as to the Kenyons' attitude toward the head of the house, Miss Kenyon had certainly not been given any confidences concerning Hubert's engagement.

"She has no money of her own, I suppose?" was the next question.

Joe Kenyon and his wife looked at each other rather helplessly, and it seemed that no further answer was needed, for Miss Kenyon at once continued, "Folly, absurd folly, and you know it. If Arthur Woodroffe likes to make a fool of himself, he can. What he does or does not do is neither here nor there. But I shall have no hand in it, and any influence I have with my father . . ."

She had risen to her feet as she spoke, and now stood with her hands clenched, an erect and dominating figure. She was over sixty, but she was still a handsome woman, full of vitality and energy; and at that moment Arthur could not but concede her a grudging measure of admiration. He felt as if he had seen her fully awake for the first time. Her rather pale blue eyes were suddenly keen and alert, and there was an air of mastery about her that reminded him of her father. By the side of her, Mrs Turner and her brother with their sandy-gray hair and their tendency to an untidy corpulence, seemed to belong to another race. Esther, if the head of the house was to be taken as the standard, was the only true Kenyon of the second generation, unless Eleanor's father, the errant, independent James,

had been of his sister's breed? Had he, perhaps, had his sister's hands also; those white, strong managing hands that were now so threateningly clenched?

She stood there for a moment, dominating them all, while she allowed the threat of her unfinished sentence to take effect; then she turned and left the room with a quiet dignity that was in itself a menace.

Nevertheless, Arthur at least had not been intimidated by her outburst, and her contemptuous reference to himself had provided him with the very stimulant he desired. Moreover, he had now a fierce desire to humiliate his handsome opponent, a desire that arose from a new source. He had seen her as a woman for the first time, and he was aware in himself of a hitherto unrealised impulse to cruelty. He wanted to break and dominate that proud, erect figure. However sneeringly she had challenged him, and in the zest of his unsatisfied youth, he longed to conquer her, although his victory could be but the barren victory of the intellect.

He took the seat Miss Kenyon had just vacated with a pleasant sense of mastery. He felt that he could do anything he liked with the other four. They were all of them looking, just then, so completely cowed and depressed. Joe Kenyon and his sister were crumpled into their chairs, with an air of rather absurd dejection. Mrs Kenyon had resumed her fancy work and was bending over it in an attitude that suggested the possibility of hidden tears; and Turner, nervously twisting his exquisitely neat little moustache, was staring thoughtfully at his own reflection in the darkened window.

"I don't see why *we* shouldn't help Hubert, all



the same," Arthur tried, by way of making a beginning.

Little Turner withdrew his gaze from the window and regarded the intrepid youth with an expression of half-amused pity.

"You don't *know*," was his only comment.

"Well, I think I do, to a certain extent," Arthur said boldly. "Uncle Joe told me a good many things to-night, one way and another. More than he cared to admit, perhaps, before Miss Kenyon."

He had made a deliberate bid for inclusion into their secret counsels by that last sentence, and he had at least succeeded in stimulating their interest.

"Oh, well, well," his uncle said, sitting up with an effect of reinflation, "perhaps I did. Esther's got a queer temper, now and then. And possibly I told you more than was altogether discreet. He looked at his brother-in-law as he added, "I'll admit to being a bit down in the mouth about the whole affair."

"But do you really think," Mrs Kenyon began unhopefully, "that it would be any *good* for you to come into the affair at all?"

"Well, I'm perfectly free, you know," Arthur said, and instantly realised that he had said the forbidden thing. They could not bear that admission of bondage in a full company.

"Can't see that that's anything to do with it," Turner replied. "We're all free enough, so far as that goes. Point is, whether your interference is advisable; whether you might not put Mr Kenyon's back up and make things a hundred times worse for Hubert."

Arthur chose to overlook the snub. "Well, I don't see that it could do any harm," he said. He felt pleasantly young and capable among those four

old people; he believed that they were too inert to oppose him, that they would accept any leader capable of taking the initiative. "Anything I did," he continued, "would only react on me, and I—don't care. Uncle Joe has warned me that Mr Kenyon may sling me out of the house at an hour's notice, but I'm perfectly willing to take that risk."

No one answered him. For the second time in two minutes he had all too clearly displayed their weakness with his youthful boast of freedom, and this time they had no defence but to ignore him. For a few seconds there was a painful, uneasy silence, and then Turner looked at Mrs Kenyon and said, in a confidential tone,—

"What does Eleanor say about it all? I suppose you've asked her advice?"

"She thinks he'll be against it," Mrs Kenyon said timidly. "But nothing has been said to him as yet. She—she would like Hubert to go away—but I can't see how—even if we accepted . . ." She glanced at Arthur as she concluded.

"Oh, well," Turner replied, standing up, "we'll have to leave it at that presumably. No good in our interfering, obviously." And he looked at his wife, who began to fumble her work into an untidy bundle, preparatory to getting to her feet.

"With our own trouble hanging over us," she remarked allusively, and added, "What's going to happen to poor Ken, I don't know. He's determined that he won't come to live here."

They were all standing now, saying good-night, but Joe Kenyon lagged behind with Arthur as they trailed across the spaces of the drawing-room.

"I'm afraid it's no good, you know," he murmured, "very generous of you to make the offer, all the same."

When he was alone in his own delightful bedroom, Arthur stood at the open window, listening to the sound of the rain and inhaling the welcome scents of the grateful earth. Already his mood of resentment against these four impotent old people had passed. They had snubbed and checked him, given him to understand that though he might, indeed, know something of the facts of their position, he knew nothing of the spirit. But he could not cherish anger against them, nor even contempt. They had been in shackles too long; he could not reasonably expect them to enter with him into any kind of conspiracy against the old man. They were so helpless, so completely dependent upon his goodwill. Nevertheless, although they had given him no authority, he meant to persist in his endeavour although he risked expulsion from this Paradise of comfort and well-being. He was genuinely anxious to help his uncle, aunt, and cousin, and he thrilled at the thought of crossing swords with Miss Kenyon. If he defeated her, it would, indeed, be a glorious victory.

And, possibly, Eleanor would be on his side? He had an amazingly clear picture of her in his mind, a forlorn, independent child, in the midst of the splendours of the Hartling hall. He could see her standing by the side of the colossal elephant's pad; an amazing contrast between the slender and the gross.

What was it his uncle had called her? "A lovely, solemn little chit?" Yes, she was lovely. He had hardly realised it until now. Perhaps she would change her opinion of him after to-morrow.



# VIII



## VIII

ARTHUR'S usual hour for his morning interview with old Mr Kenyon was 11 o'clock, but two or three times a week he received a message either at breakfast or immediately after, releasing him from attendance. He had been prepared for such a reprieve this morning, imagining that the old man might be a trifle exhausted by his passage of arms with Kenyon Turner the day before, but as no message arrived he went into the library to read the morning papers for an hour and a half before going upstairs.

All the important journals were taken at Hartling, most of them in duplicate; and Arthur was probably the only member of the household who had ever considered the expense involved. He had calculated once that, including magazines and other periodicals, more than a hundred pounds a year were spent under this head alone. But the expenditure of the place was all on the same magnificent scale. Arthur remembered his uncle's whimsical comment that cigars were not provided in the workhouse, and smiled grimly at the thought that the inmates of Hartling were the most pampered paupers in the world.

The library was empty that morning. Arthur generally found Hubert there at that time, but he had presumably had breakfast even earlier than usual and gone out. Nor did Mr Turner, who came in half an hour later, settle himself down there to

his customary study of the *Times*. Instead he nodded a curt good-morning to Arthur, selected half a dozen papers, and immediately retired with them to some other room.

After that Arthur was left severely alone. The inference was clear enough: the Kenyons did not wish to appear in the cause he was going to plead. They might approve his intention but they preferred not to influence it. If he failed, they would deny any kind of responsibility for what he had said. Their attitude had been foreshadowed in the course of their conversation the previous night. "No good *our* interfering," Turner had said. They were afraid of being dismissed from their luxurious almshouse.

Arthur put down his paper, walked across to the window, and stood there looking out into the gardens. It had rained heavily in the night and there was more rain coming. Low wisps of ashen gray cloud were travelling intently across the dark purples of the heavy background, and the horizon was hidden by the mist of an approaching downpour. It was not a day, he reflected, remembering many such days, to spend in going from house to house through fountains of London mud; nor in receiving poor patients at the surgery. How their wet clothes reeked! They brought all the worst of the weather in with them, the mud and the wet invaded the consulting room; one was never dry or clean on such days as these.

Instinctively he rubbed his hands together, and then looked down at them. They were better kept than when he had first come to Hartling; it had been impossible to keep his hands like that in Peckham. He liked the brown of their tan, deeper on the back than at the finger tips, and his nails were



rather good. It was worth while now to spend a little time on them.

Were the Kenyons to be pitied? They were not free, of course, but no one was free. They were certainly more free living their life here than he would be if he went back to Peckham. It was a dog's life that, even Somers couldn't deny it.

The tall trees in the garden were bent by a rush of wind, and the rain suddenly spattered furiously against the plate glass of the window. How protected one was here! Hartling windows did not rattle in the gale, nor let in the wet. A day such as this gave a zest to the comfort of it all. And although one could not go out there was plenty to do, any amount of books to read, billiards with Turner, and probably they would play bridge in the afternoon—his uncle, Turner, and Elizabeth all played quite a good game. . . .

If the old man turned him out for interfering in a matter in which he was not concerned, he would have to go back to Somers for a night or two. If he was not very careful with the little money still left to him, he would have to give up the idea of Canada altogether. Living in a place like this for five weeks changed one's scale of values. He did not look forward to "roughing it" so much as he had before he came away from Peckham.

Was he pledged in any way to plead Hubert's cause with his grandfather? Would it not be better from every point of view to leave it alone? If Hubert's own family would not put in a word for him, why should a comparative stranger interfere? The old man would almost certainly be annoyed. How on earth could one open the subject to him without impertinence? That offer last night had been made in a moment of sentimental benevolence.

He had been worked up by that pathetic story Uncle Joe had told him, and they—he bunched the whole Kenyon family together in this thought of them—could not blame him if he backed out at the last minute. *They* could not put on airs in that connection. His only regret would be that Miss Kenyon would score. He would have liked to have beaten *her*, but what possible chance had he of doing that? The fact was that he was standing it all to nothing. He would be a damned fool to risk being turned out of Hartling just now, for the sake of a romantic notion of generosity. It was not as if his pleading were likely to help Hubert; it would probably make things ten times worse for him by putting the old man's back up. . . .

He heard the mellow chime of the hall clock striking eleven, and reluctantly turned to the door. He passed through the main drawing-room on his way, and found all the family except Hubert and Eleanor, sitting there engrossed in their usual occupations. None of them spoke to him as he passed through. Miss Kenyon looked up at him for a moment as he came in, but he could not decide whether her expression was one of challenge or confidence in her own ability to get what she wanted.

As he slowly mounted the wide staircase he still saw them all in imagination, waiting with a rather pleasurable excitement for the news of his interview. No doubt they knew well enough that he was going to sign the order for his own exile. Had they waited in just the same way when James Kenyon had defied his father twenty-five years earlier?

He paused half-way up the stairs and looked down into the hall. He could see the great elephant's pad standing there, with an effect of gross and imperturbable solidity. Since last night, he

had come in some odd way to associate that clumping thing with Eleanor. He could almost see her now, a slender, solemn child, dusty with recent travel, waiting to learn her destiny. . . .

And it was Eleanor whom he saw first when he entered Mr Kenyon's suite of apartments. She had answered his knock—no one went into those rooms without knocking—and he found her standing near the door with an effect of impatience.

"Are you going to say anything to him about Hubert?" she asked at once in a low voice.

Arthur hesitated before he said, "I've been thinking that perhaps, on the whole, it would be better if I didn't. It might make it worse for him. I've no sort of influence with Mr Kenyon, I mean."

She looked at him suspiciously. He could not mistake the doubt in her eyes. She did not believe in the excuse that he had put forward. She had always mistrusted him for some reason or other.

"Well, have I?" he persisted feebly.

"None whatever, I should imagine," she said; "only, I thought. . . . She paused and looked towards the closed door of the inner room. "You're ten minutes late now," she added inconsequently.

He was irated by her attitude towards him, her dismissal of him as a person of no importance. He longed to show her that he was not a man to be lightly despised. But all he could find to say was a foolish, petulant accusation of her own motives. Had she not impugned his?

"No doubt you would be glad enough to see me turned out," he said, with an almost childlike sullenness. "You've always disliked me."

She stood quite still, staring past him towards the door of her grandfather's room. She was again wearing the dress of pale gray linen in which he had

first seen her; and she looked exquisitely sweet, fresh, and young. But he was glad that he had been rude to her. By that rudeness he had shown that he thought of her, and that he resented her opinion of him. He would sooner that she hated him than that she should be indifferent.

"You think, then," she said, after what seemed to be a long pause, "that you might get—turned out, if you said anything to my grandfather about Hubert? You know enough for that?"

"I suppose I know pretty nearly everything there is to know now," he replied sulkily.

She looked at him quickly, and then turned her eyes away again. "Uncle Joe told you?" she asked.

With some vague idea of loyalty in his mind, Arthur tried to exculpate his uncle by saying, "Partly, yes; but he had nothing to do with the suggestion of my speaking to Mr Kenyon about Hubert."

"No, of course not," Eleanor said; "and in any case you've decided not to."

He thought there was still a hint of question in her tone, as if she still hoped that he might be persuaded to champion his cousin's cause; and he grasped the opportunity to get back to the point she had, as he believed, deliberately passed by.

"You admit that I shan't do any good to Hubert," he said. "Why are you so anxious that I should get myself into trouble by interfering—unless it is that you want to be rid of me? Because if that's all, I can go at any time of my own free will."

"I don't want you to go," she said coldly.

"Then why are you so keen on—on my taking the chance of offending Mr Kenyon?" he insisted.

She faced him with a cool, steady stare. "You

can't seriously believe," she said, "that I should be so mean and small as to persuade you into this for any purely selfish purpose of my own? Why, none of them would be as paltry as that."

He blushed, but he would not drop his eyes from hers. "I'm to respect *your* motives, of course," he said defiantly; "but you're at liberty to impute any sort of cowardice to me?"

"Isn't it cowardice then?" she asked, returning his stare without flinching. "Haven't you changed your mind because you're afraid of having to leave here?"

She had defeated him; and realising that he dared not answer that question truthfully, he sought refuge in a youthful petulance. "Oh! very well," he said, turning his back on her, and crossing the room towards the inner door. "Have it your own way. You can think anything you like about me. *I* don't care." He knocked and then entered Mr Kenyon's room, without looking back to see what effect this speech might have on her. He was persuaded that he did not care any longer what she thought of him. She was so confoundedly self-sufficient and superior.

Mr Kenyon was reading the *Times*, a thing he could do without the aid of glasses. His sight and hearing were apparently as good as Arthur's own. But he dropped the paper on his knees as Arthur came in.

"You've been having a talk with Eleanor?" he remarked in his usual friendly tone. "What a wonderful girl she is, isn't she? I'm surprised that you and she don't get on better together. I had hoped you might be friends."

Arthur was slightly taken aback. It had never occurred to him that the old man might wish him

to be on more friendly terms with Eleanor. He had never before referred to the subject in any way. Had he, perhaps, heard or guessed at the quarrel between them in the next room?

"I'm afraid she doesn't like me?" he explained.

"Oh! in that case there's nothing more to be said," the old man replied quietly. "Well, you needn't stay this morning, if you've anything else to do. I had meant to send you a message."

Arthur understood that he was dismissed, that he might now go back and explain to the people downstairs that he had been given no opportunity to act as the family's catspaw that morning. For twenty-four hours at least he was relieved from any kind of obligation, and in the meantime he could re-discuss the whole question with Hubert and his father. There was but one objection to this plan; he would have to tell Eleanor as he returned through the next room.

He sighed and stood irresolute. Mr Kenyon had returned to his study of the *Times*. No encouragement could be hoped from that quarter. The old man had an amazing gift of detaching his interest from his surroundings. He had probably forgotten that his attendant was still in the room. Why could not Eleanor have undertaken this mission herself? Oh! obviously because she knew that it was futile, purposeless, utterly foolish. Nevertheless, he was not going to be accused of cowardice, nor of trying to propitiate the old man for the sake of being remembered in his will.

"Might I speak to you a minute, sir?" Arthur made his opening curtly, almost contemptuously. By the very act of asking the question he had regained his freedom. He saw that his fear and respect of the old man before him were based on noth-

ing but the longing for comfort and luxury, for abundance and idleness. Now that he had resolved to leave Hartling rather than endure the accusation of cowardice, all his fears had slipped from him.

Mr Kenyon put down his paper and looked up. His pale blue eyes were suddenly intent, the eyes of a hunting animal or a bird of prey, in sight but not yet sure of its quarry.

"Sit down, Arthur," he said quietly, pointing to a chair nearly opposite to his own. "You may speak for an hour if you wish. I have nothing to do this morning."

"It was about Hubert," Arthur said, accepting the invitation to sit down. He did not care now, so far as he himself was concerned, what was the upshot of this conversation, but while he was about it he might as well do his best for poor old Hubert.

Mr Kenyon nodded, gravely attentive.

"No doubt, sir, you'll wonder what concern it is of mine," Arthur continued, "but the truth is that I like Hubert, and I'm rather sorry for him. . . ."

"Sorry for him?" Mr Kenyon repeated with a faint surprise.

"We young men of the present generation, sir," Arthur explained, revelling now in his sense of liberty, "think a great deal of our freedom. I don't mean to say that *Hubert* has any particular ambition in that direction. He was brought up in a different atmosphere. But from my point of view, you see, his life seems dreadfully confined and limited, though perhaps it is a trifle presumptuous for me to be sorry for him on that account."

"And you wish . . .?" Mr Kenyon suggested, without the least sign of displeasure.

"Oh, well! that's another matter," Arthur said. "The fact is, sir, that Hubert has fallen in love,

and for some reason that I can't pretend to understand, neither he nor my uncle seem to care about coming to ask your consent to his marriage. So—so I've come to plead his cause for him."

"Who is the girl he wants to marry?" Mr Kenyon put in. A change had come over him in the course of Arthur's last sentences. He sat less stiffly in his chair; he had the air of a man re-confronted by some familiar trouble with which he had often battled in the past.

"Her name is Dorothy Martin," Arthur began. "She . . ."

Mr Kenyon interrupted him with a gesture of his hand. "I know, he said, 'her father is Lord Massey's agent—a homely fellow and rather stupid. So Hubert wants to marry Miss Martin, does he?'" His head drooped a little forward and he began to slide his hands slowly backward and forward along his knees.

Arthur felt suddenly sorry for him. Neither Hubert nor his father had told him that Miss Martin's father was, to put it bluntly, not in the Kenyons' class. He understood better now why they had hesitated to approach the old man. And how decently he had taken it! Without any sign of anger, even of vexation.

"I believe he's very much in love with her," Arthur murmured.

Mr Kenyon sighed and sat up. "As you remarked just now, Arthur," he said, "you naturally can't be expected to understand, and I wonder if it would be indiscreet of a very, very old man to enlighten you?"

His expression as he spoke was pathetic, wistful; he looked at Arthur as if he besought him to approve the offered confidence.



"You may be absolutely sure, sir, that I shall not repeat anything you care to tell me," Arthur assured him.

"Nor let it affect your relations with my family?" the old man added, and then while Arthur still sought a convincing reply to that rather difficult question, went on: "We are necessarily lonely in our old age, my boy, but I sometimes wonder if my case is not in some ways unusual. Or is it that I have suffered for overstepping the reasonable limit of mortality?" He rose from his chair as he spoke and began to pace slowly up and down the room.

"I have taken a peculiar fancy to you, Arthur," he continued after a brief pause, "and I need not be ashamed to tell you why; it is because I admire the independence of your spirit. I liked the way you spoke to me just now; your disregard of what might have been against your own interests; your championship of Hubert. I could wish—I have often wished—that there was more of the same spirit in my own family."

Arthur flushed with pleasure. But it seemed to him that he understood now, finally, conclusively, the secret of the Kenyons.

They were all cowards, and the old man despised them for their cowardice; not one of them had ever had the courage to stand up to him. If he had, in a sense, bullied them, it was because he had tried to stimulate them into some show of active response. Nevertheless, Arthur attempted an excuse for them.

"Perhaps, sir," he said, "if they had had to face the world as I have . . ."

Mr Kenyon had paused in his walk and now stood in front of him, gravely attentive. But as Arthur hesitated, trying to frame a statement that

should not sound too boastful, the old man held up his hand.

"Well, well," he said, "I don't wish to discuss my family with you. My purpose is more selfish than that. I only want you not to misjudge me, as you might very reasonably do, in the circumstances. Downstairs, no doubt, I may sometimes appear in the light of an autocrat." And he lifted his head with a little jerk that wonderfully expressed his own awareness of the absurdity of that accusation.

"You see, my boy," he went on, resuming his deliberate pacing of the room, "I have long been aware that none of my children, unless it be Esther, resemble me in character. They are not," he smiled with an air of excusing his choice of a metaphor, "not fighters. There was my poor boy James, Eleanor's father. I don't know if they have told you anything about him?"

"I have heard something," Arthur admitted.

"Oh, well! then you will understand what a grief his career was to me," Mr Kenyon said with a sigh. "I knew his weakness better than he knew it himself," he continued reflectively, "but he would not listen to me. I've been forced to take care of them all, because they are none of them able to take care of themselves. I would have saved James, too, if he would have let me. And all I insist upon, in return, is that they should stay here with me, where I can, in a sense, watch over them. Perhaps I'm getting senile. The old habit of thought is too strong in me. If I let them go out into the world, at their age, they would surely be safe enough; but the thought of it arouses all my old uneasiness. But in any case it can't be long now."

He had fallen into a brooding monotone, as if he

spoke his thoughts aloud; and now he raised himself with an effort and stared at Arthur as though he had become suddenly aware of his presence in the room.

"So Hubert wants to marry Miss Martin, does he?" he asked, returning to the point at issue; "and has sent you to plead for him."

"No, he didn't send me, sir," Arthur explained. "It was entirely my own idea."

Mr Kenyon smiled paternally. "Rash youth! rash youth!" he said. "Have you no battles of your own to fight?"

"Well, at the moment, no sir," Arthur replied, "I have been having a very easy time here for the last five weeks."

"And now you're pining to get back into the struggle again, eh?" Mr Kenyon said, with a lift of his eyebrows. "Well, youth and senility are the ages of selfishness, and when there comes a clash between them it is senility that always must give way. And yet, Arthur, I should be so glad if you *could* stay with me—till the end. I gave you my reasons when we first talked the matter over together. I can add still another, now; I've taken a great liking for you. Are you absolutely determined to go?"

"I? No, sir. I didn't mean . . ." Arthur stammered.

The old man was watching him keenly. "But you don't deny that you had that in your mind, when you began to speak to me about Hubert?" he said, and then, reading confirmation of that statement in Arthur's embarrassment, he came up to him and laid his hands on his shoulders.

"Natural enough; natural enough, my boy," he said, "there's nothing to be ashamed of. And I

wouldn't ask you to make the sacrifice if I were a younger man. But as it is what difference will a year, two years at most, make to you at your time of life? Come, now," he smiled with a flash of roguery, "let's make a bargain! Your friend Hubert shall have his Miss Martin, if you'll promise to stay with me and perform those little duties I mentioned when I'm gone."

"Oh, of course, sir, rather," Arthur said, blushing with pleasure and embarrassment. "I would promise that in any case. There's no need for any—any *quid pro quo*, I mean."

Mr Kenyon still had his hands on the young man's shoulders, and he gave him a gentle shake as he said, "Very well, that's a bargain then; and I may tell you that you've taken a great weight off my mind. Now, go and tell Hubert to come up to me. I'll promise to let him off more lightly than he deserves."

Arthur strode out of the room with the conscious pride of one who has all life at his feet.

Eleanor rose from the desk at which she was writing as he entered.

"So you did speak to him after all?" she said, searching his face with an eager, inquiring stare.

"Yes, I did. It's all right," Arthur returned, disciplining his expression of triumph to a becoming modesty. "He wants to see Hubert now. He has promised to let him off lightly," he said.

"And you're staying on?" Eleanor inquired.

"Yes. He—he made me promise that." Arthur found himself inexplicably dropping into apology. "I couldn't possibly refuse him, could I? You see he wants me to be here—at the end."

"I understand," Eleanor said coldly, turning her back on him and reseating herself at the desk.

"Will you give Hubert the message or shall I send some one?"

"I'll go," Arthur replied curtly.

He was suddenly vexed and disheartened. She had dispersed all the glamour of his achievement; had made him feel as if he had done a mean rather than a splendid thing. There could be but one explanation of her attitude—she suspected him of working on her grandfather's affections. No doubt she knew that he had become a special favourite; had known it probably before he knew it himself. Yet even so, if there were no jealousy on her part—and Uncle Joe had made it certain last night that her motives were above suspicion—why should she be so annoyed? Was she afraid that he might be designing to cut out the rest of the family?

He had reached the hall when that explanation came to him, and he paused there, burnt with shame by the bare thought of such a suspicion. It was degrading, infamous. He felt that he could not endure that she should hold such an opinion of him for another moment. He turned back towards the staircase with the intention of instantly challenging her, and then a better means of vindication occurred to him, and he went on into the drawing-room.

They were all there now, except Eleanor; and they made no attempt to disguise their interest and excitement. They faced the door with what seemed to be a concerted movement as he entered—and at once misread the signs of his still evident emotion.

Miss Kenyon, indeed, made so sure of the correctness of her inference that she acted upon it without further consideration.

Arthur saw her then, he believed, in her true character. She rose and came towards him across the room with an effect of vindictive triumph. Her

pale blue eyes were bright, the pupils contracted almost to a pin-point; they were the eyes of some fierce bird that is at last within sight of the kill.

"Well?" she said in a clear, cold voice, "so you've seen my father."

Arthur made no attempt to prevaricate. "Yes, he wants to see Hubert," he said, and looked across the room at his cousin as he added, "I understand that he won't raise any objection." He saw, as he spoke, the lift of Hubert's head and the quick change of his expression, before his attention was snatched back to Miss Kenyon.

"And you?" she asked sharply.

There was no need to put the question more plainly. He knew they all knew what she meant.

"Your father has asked me to stay on—indefinitely," he said quietly.

She made no reply, but she instantly veiled her eyes, lowering her glance to the simple brooch she was wearing at her breast, at the same time putting up a hand as if to adjust it. And when she looked up again her expression betrayed no sign of anger or resentment.

He was disappointed. He had expected, even hoped, for some indication of defeat from her. Vaguely he had pictured her going up to her father to enter a violent protest. This apparently meek submission annoyed him.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," he said provocatively.

"I have forgotten the meaning of the word disappointment," she returned gravely, looked him full in the eyes for a moment, and then passed on towards the door.

Her self-control was superb, but the picture that remained in Arthur's mind was of her advance to-

wards him across the room. For one instant he had been afraid of her.

"I say! is it all right, do you think?" Hubert eagerly asked, as Arthur joined the group at the farther end of the room.

"Perfectly all right, old chap—I believe," Arthur replied. "Hadn't you better toddle up and see him at once?"

"But what did you tell him?" Hubert persisted.

"Everything I knew," Arthur said. "Cut along."

"I suppose you're very proud of yourself?" Elizabeth put in demurely as her brother went out.

"I'm very glad for Hubert's sake," was Arthur's amendment.

"Only for his sake?" Elizabeth commented carelessly.

Turner, with the *Times* on his knees, was thoughtfully twisting his neat little moustache. "So you're going to stay on indefinitely?" he remarked.

"Well, yes; that's to say Mr Kenyon said he would like me to," Arthur replied rather lamely. He was aware of a sense of antagonism between him and the others. None of them so far had shown the least inclination to thank him for acting as their catspaw. All they thought about apparently was the fact that he was going to remain permanently at Hartling. And he knew that the time had come to vindicate his motives, to express that purpose which had come to him in the hall when he relinquished the idea of confronting and, if possible, confounding Eleanor.

He drew up a chair and sat down, with an air that he felt claimed his right to be included in the family conclave.

"I wonder if you'll let me say something to you

all about a rather delicate matter?" he asked, looking at his uncle.

Joe Kenyon raised himself uneasily in his chair and glanced round the faces of the little circle. They were all alert now. There could be no question that they correctly anticipated the nature of the "matter" the new-comer was going to discuss, although they were uncertain what precisely he might have to say about it.

"Yes, Arthur, yes. Say anything you like," Joe Kenyon replied rather doubtfully. "Now we know that you've come to stay for good, of course, there's no reason why you shouldn't have—well—our confidence."

"I don't want that," Arthur said. "I want to give you mine. I feel, you know, in a confoundedly awkward position, and I'd like to clear it up if I could. I do want you all to understand more particularly that I'm—that I'm not 'on the make' in this business."

He paused a moment, but no one made any comment—unless Turner's slight nod of the head could be regarded as an invitation for him to continue.

"I feel, you see, for one thing," Arthur went on, "that I am in a sense at least an outsider, not one of the family anyhow, and I do realise too that the circumstances are pretty well unique. So what I thought of proposing was that I should make some sort of undertaking—I'd put it in writing—that if by any extraordinary chance I should be—be specially favoured later, if you know what I mean, I would hand most of anything I got, back to the family. I should think we could get some sort of binding deed drawn up to that effect, couldn't we?"

Not until he stopped speaking did Arthur see



how terribly he had embarrassed them by thus naming the secret thing in public. Mrs Turner was fumbling with her work; her husband leaned back in his chair, staring up at the ceiling; and Elizabeth, flushing slightly, got up and walked over to the window.

It was his aunt who answered him, however, indirectly. "Perhaps we'd better go into another room, Catherine," she said, addressing her sister-in-law. "I've never been able to understand legal affairs, and this proposal of Arthur's, so far as I understand it, seems to be something of the kind."

Mrs Turner grabbed her work and got up with a nod of agreement, but then some purpose seemed to stiffen her. She hesitated, nearly dropped the bead bag she was making, and said in a scarcely audible voice, "But we do appreciate the spirit of it all the same."

"Oh, rather! of course," her brother echoed her.

Turner returned to that as an opening, when the three men were left alone to discuss the proposition that had been vaguely indicated. "Very decent of you, Woodroffe," he said; "and you put the thing quite delicately too; but you understand, don't you, that it would never do to have any kind of formal agreement?"

"I don't. I should prefer it to be as formal and binding as possible," Arthur protested.

Joe Kenyon shook his head. "No, no, it would never do," he said. "You see, my boy, the old man might think we'd been influencing you."

"Good Lord! I'd make that clear enough to him," Arthur exclaimed.

The two older men exchanged a smile that pitied his innocence.

"You don't know him," Turner remarked caustically.

Arthur was a trifle disgusted. He was still warm with gratitude to the old man who had treated him so delightfully that morning, and he resented the bitter note of aspersion in Turner's voice.

"He has been most frightfully decent to me," he said coldly.

Joe Kenyon began to drum on the arm of his chair. "Well, no need to go into that, eh, Charles?" he asked nervously. "The point is—what we've got to make clear to Arthur comes to this, that we're quite glad, what! to trust his word without any damned deeds and so on?"

"Oh, quite! quite!" Turner agreed.

"But you know . . ." Arthur began to protest.

"My dear chap," Turner interrupted him, "if we can trust you to do the straight thing that's surely all that's necessary. Shake hands on it, if you like; but no parchments, for the Lord's sake."

"Very good of you," Arthur mumbled, a little overwhelmed by this evidence of their faith in him.

"If we hadn't trusted you, I couldn't have said what I did last night," his uncle put in. "And I for one am very grateful to you for interfering in Hubert's affair." He sighed profoundly as he concluded: "It will help him in some ways, I don't doubt."

There was apparently nothing more to be said, and Arthur was on his feet preparing to go when Turner remarked casually to his brother-in-law, "Totting 'em up pretty fast just now, isn't he? That'll make three more of us if poor old Ken has to come in."

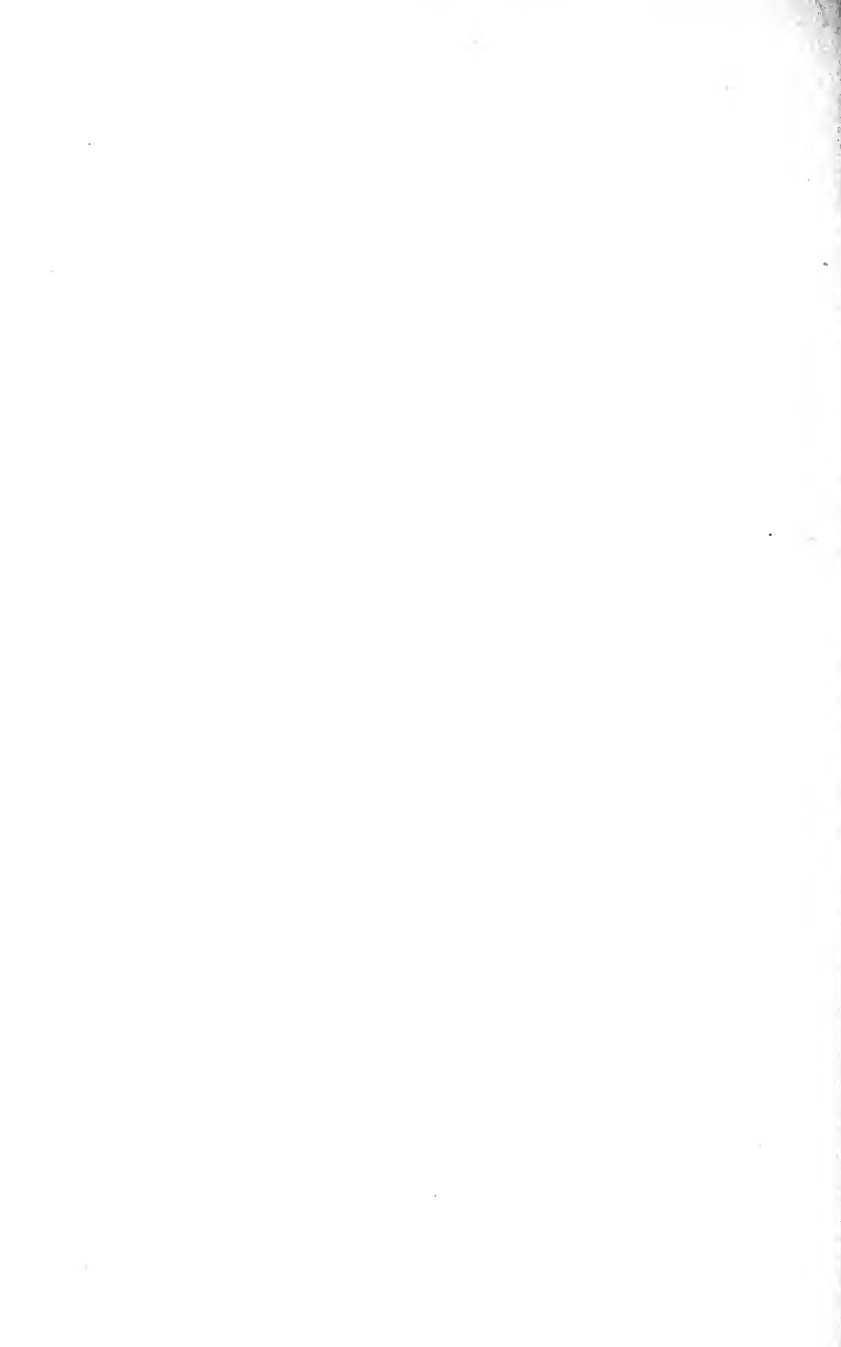
Joe Kenyon's only reply was to draw down the corners of his mouth and raise his eyebrows.

Arthur did not want to hear any more. He was sorry that he had heard so much. These petty criticisms of old Kenyon made him despise Turner and his uncle; they represented another aspect of their cowardice. Damn it, the old man was worth the lot of them, if you excluded Eleanor.

He supposed that she would hear of his agreement with the family, and wondered if she would apologise to him.







## IX

ARTHUR received a letter from Somers by the second post. It was still raining, and he was playing billiards with Turner when the letter arrived, so he did not open it until after tea.

Somers had written in a mood of depression. Bates, Arthur's successor at the Peckham surgery, was not a success. "The fool means well, too well," Somers wrote; "but I was wrong in anticipating that the panel patients would like him. They don't. They have taken his measure, and all his good intentions can't disguise the fact that he is pudding-headed. When are you going to Canada? If you *are* going? Isn't that visit of yours being amazingly protracted? I suppose you're lapped in luxury and can't tear yourself away. Or have you got a permanent job there as tame medico to the old man? Or is it a girl? I wish to God you would write and tell me in any case. I can't keep Bates (he has got on my nerves) and I should like to know for certain if there is the least hope of your coming back. I can't see you marrying for money, and if the hypothecated girl is the right sort, she would face the world with you on five hundred a year. I might make it up to that. The private practice is better than it was. Sackville, who has been here so long, is getting too old. You and I between us would get pretty nearly all the new people. And if my first guess was the right one and you've got some sort of sinecure in the Hartling household, the

sooner you chuck it the better, my son. For one thing you'll get soft, and for another you'll get no experience. If you were doing hospital work (which you ought to be), I should not try to tempt you away, but if you are just letting your mind rot, I shall think it is my duty to save you at any cost."

As he read, Arthur lost the sense of his surroundings. He visualised the narrow sitting-room of the little Peckham house, and heard Somers's voice telling him that he ought to be doing hospital work or getting varied experience in a general practice; that he was becoming soft, going to pieces from a professional point of view. He blushed like a student under the rebuke of the demonstrator.

Then he looked up and the illusion vanished. He saw that all his circumstances were now changed. All that advice would be sound enough if he were forced to return to such a general practice as Peckham. But if the old man left him, say £10,000, he might have a shot for his Fellowship; try for a registrarship at one of the bigger hospitals; perhaps get on the staff of one and set up in Wimpole Street. With a certain amount of capital, this would be so much easier, and the war had given him a taste for minor surgery. Indeed, it had always appealed to him more than medicine. Meanwhile, it was true that he must not let himself get rusty. He ought to go on reading, order some books from town; or at least have the *Lancet* sent to him every Friday. He must keep himself up to date while he was waiting. At the outside, he could not have to wait more than five years. He would only be thirty-three then. . . .

He paused doubtfully on that thought, but just then Hubert came in, and the moment of uneasiness passed and was forgotten. It had stopped raining



and Hubert thought that they might put in nine holes before dinner.

It was made clear on the way up to the links, however, that golf was not Hubert's goal on this occasion. He had a wild hope that Miss Martin might be found at the Club House. He had wanted, naturally enough, to tell her at once that the engagement was to be permitted, but his grandfather had sent him up to the farm on a job that had kept him busy all the afternoon.

"Probably did it just to tantalise me a bit," Hubert complained; "teach me that I couldn't have everything my own way."

"Oh, surely not!" Arthur protested. He was offended, again, by this imputation of unworthy motives to old Mr Kenyon. "I don't believe any of you understand him," he continued warmly. "We had quite a long talk this morning and he rather came out of his shell. He may seem a bit hard and inhuman at times, you know, but underneath, I'm certain he's trying to do the best for everybody."

Hubert looked faintly surprised. "Oh! that was the way he took you, was it?" he remarked.

"There you go again," Arthur said. "You, all of you, seem to have made up your minds that—that—I don't know——"

He could not complete his sentence. He could see that they all feared the old man, but they never brought any explicit charge against him unless it were that he bullied them into staying on at Hartling. And all that had been explained. Arthur, remembering his conversation of the morning, was strongly inclined now to take the old man's side. He knew their weaknesses. They were a poor lot obviously. They lacked independence of spirit; if

they were allowed to go out into the world they would come awful croppers like the unfortunate, hot-headed James, Eleanor's father. The old man had learnt a lesson in the course of that affair. He was a bit of an autocrat, no doubt; but he had good reason to be, with a family that could not be trusted.

Hubert appeared either unwilling or unable to provide a definition of the family's attitude. "Oh, well," he said, "no good discussing that, is it? Here we are and we've got to put up with it. And, personally, you know, I don't care much now—partly thanks to you, old man."

Only "partly," Arthur reflected, but he made no comment on that. "That's all right, then," was all he said.

Hubert was in luck, for Miss Martin was at the Club House, drawn thither, no doubt, by the same hope that had stimulated her lover, and although they cheerfully proposed a foursome, Arthur knew that they would sooner be alone, and declined. The proposed fourth player in the case was Fergusson, the general practitioner from the village, to whom reference had been made when the post of medical attendant had been first offered to Arthur. He and Fergusson had met once or twice on the links, but their brief conversations had so far been limited to golf. The doctor was a man of sixty or so, with thick gray hair and moustache and a strong, clumsy figure. Arthur had formed the opinion that he was rather a surly fellow.

"Care to take me on for nine holes—haven't time for more?" Arthur asked him.

Fergusson nodded. "Not that I'm particularly anxious to play," he said. "The ground will be very wet, I'm thinking, after all the rain we've had to-day. I just looked in on my way home, without

much idea of getting a game. Indeed, to be honest, I've had a very long day and am not so anxious to exert myself."

"Scattered sort of practice, I expect," Arthur commented. "Have a cigar."

Fergusson accepted the cigar with a nod of thanks. "One of your perquisites?" he asked, smiling rather grimly.

Arthur stiffened. "Never thought of it like that," he said. "They're all over the shop up there. You just take 'em as you want 'em."

"No need to get ruffled," Fergusson replied quietly. "I know. I used to be up there once a week or so before you came. Nice little sinecure."

"But I say, look here," Arthur said, suddenly conscious for the first time that he might have been guilty of a breach of medical etiquette, "you don't mean to tell me that I've taken away one of your cases?"

Fergusson laughed dryly. "Well, you have and you haven't," he said. "But your conscience is no doubt clear enough and everything was done in proper form. The old man wrote to me and explained, and I went up and talked it all over with him. You were playing golf on that occasion, I'm thinking. However, it'll be a soft job for you."

Arthur still looked uneasy. "I never once thought about you in that connection, you know," he said. "I ought, anyhow, to have come and seen you."

"Oh, no need to fash yourself," Fergusson returned. "Mr Kenyon was very considerate about the affair. I'm not complaining."

"Yes, he is very considerate," Arthur agreed, automatically. Had Fergusson been promised a place in that untidy will as compensation? was the

thought that flashed across his mind, a thought that was in some indefinable way unpleasant. He did not grudge the doctor his possible legacy, he sincerely hoped that it might be a big one, but he had a feeling of vague distaste for the principle involved. Why should the old man trade on these rather equivocal promises of future reward? He had given convincing reasons with regard to his own family, but they did not apply to Fergusson, nor to Scurr, the chauffeur, and the other servants. Arthur decided to try a "feeler."

"But hang it," he said, "I've done you out of a certain amount of income. All the consideration in the world doesn't make up for that."

Fergusson, looking slightly self-conscious, studied the ash of his cigar. "He's a queer old customer in some respects," he remarked illusively.

Arthur chose to overlook that comment. "I think you ought to know," he said, "that I'm not being paid any salary for my job. There's my keep, of course, but in a house like that one person more or less can't make any difference."

"Eh! Is that so?" Fergusson said. "And are you staying on indefinitely?"

"Well . . ." Arthur explained, with a wave of his hand.

"I take you," Fergusson acknowledged. "I was on much the same terms. And how d'you think the old man's looking? I've known him for twenty-five years, and he has hardly changed a hairsbreadth in that time. He'll be ninety-two this year, I'm told; but it wouldn't surprise me to learn that he was seventy or a hundred and ten. Indeed, it's come to me lately that I'd have been better advised to have sent him in a whacking account when he turned me off, for it's likely enough that he'll outlive

me. However, you stand a better chance than I do, for I presume you can give me thirty years."

Arthur shivered slightly. His suspicion had been fully confirmed, and the thought of it troubled him. Still, from one point of view, it was reasonable enough that Mr Kenyon should have this particular eccentricity. All his life he had been wrestling with a family that could not be trusted with money, and the habit had possibly grown into an obsession. He looked at Fergusson, who was somewhat grimly enjoying his cigar. He had all the appearance of an honest man. "Known him twenty-five years, have you?" he commented.

"Ay!" Fergusson said. "I came to this damned place when I was thirty-seven, and I thought I was in luck to get hold of a rich patient like Kenyon. Well, as you can judge from what I told you, he looked an oldish man then. Not so withered naturally, but if he was only sixty-six at that time I should say that he looked more than his age. But there you are. I knew an old chap of the name of Simon—he has been dead God knows how long—who was a contemporary of Kenyon's, used to do business with him in the 'sixties, and he has told me that Kenyon was always a dry stick—one of those men who look old at forty and never change afterwards.

"And there's another queer thing he told me," Fergusson went on, after a slight pause, "a thing you'll be disinclined to credit, which is, that Kenyon was never a good business man—not really able or far-sighted, that is."

"But he made a pile of money," Arthur put in.

"He did," Fergusson said, "but Simon used to say that he got it by sheer luck; that he never touched an investment that didn't go right by some fluke

or another, though by all the laws of probability, it ought to have gone just the other way. Maybe Simon was a bit jealous, but he had a mighty poor opinion of Kenyon as a business man—though begob, I'm inclined to differ from him, myself."

"He has been most frightfully decent to me," Arthur commented uneasily; and remembered that he had made the same remark to Turner a few hours earlier.

"Ay, he would be that," Fergusson said. "There have been times when I have liked him very well myself; but I always had the feeling that there was something queer about him—a trifle uncanny, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, well! Perhaps. I don't know," Arthur said. "He seems sometimes to be extraordinarily detached; as if he were living a sort of life of his own."

"Hm! Likely enough," Fergusson agreed. "Simon told me that Kenyon had a hell of a time when he was a young man. His father, who was in the business before him, was one of your old-fashioned bullies. Used to treat his son like a dog, Simon said. So no doubt Kenyon got the habit of keeping things to himself then, and it stuck to him after his father was dead."

"Yes, that might account for it, in a way," Arthur admitted.

Arthur's thoughts went back to that conversation as he dressed for dinner. He was inclined to trust Fergusson. Fergusson had been very decent about his supersession at Hartling, and it did not seem likely that his rather disparaging attitude had been designed to frighten his rival out of the field. Indeed, a few weeks ago such a suspicion would not

have crossed Arthur's mind; but there was some influence in the air of Hartling that bred suspicions of that kind, and he put them from him now with a just perceptible sense of self-approval.

The trouble that still faced him was that even when he had deliberately cleared his mind of any doubts concerning the good-faith of all the many potential legatees, he was thrust back upon a doubt of the man who appeared in the rôle of his benefactor. A few hours ago he had whole-heartedly advised and trusted him. When he had come away from his interview that morning, he had definitely ranged himself on the old man's side, had, as he believed, learnt at last to understand and approve the old man's motives.

But then, as always, he had been induced by various influences to doubt again. It seemed so impossible in this place to arrive at any certainty. No theory he had been able to formulate accounted for all the facts, not even the far-reaching, comfortable theory that there was a certain amount of right—and wrong—on both sides. There appeared to be some secret, some key to the whole situation, that was as yet beyond his reach.

Could Eleanor put it in his hands? His thought turned towards her with a leap of hopeful anticipation. She had given him no sign so far that she had repented her manifest disapproval of him that morning. She, too, perhaps, was being continually swayed by the uncertainties bred of the Hartling condition. But it might be that she had not yet heard of the unsigned agreement that he had made in imitation of her own method? In any case, he had an excuse for asking her to have a little quiet talk with him. She owed him an explanation. He could even demand it. . . .

He might be able to judge by her expression at dinner whether she had changed her opinion of his motives since the morning, and if he found the least evidence of her softening towards him, he would ask her to listen to what he had to say; to the reasons that had decided him to stay on at Hartling until her grandfather died.

But he received no sign from Eleanor in the course of dinner. She would not look at him. Though he persistently stared at her, trying to attract her attention, she managed to avoid his glance with a steadiness which could not have been accidental. She talked more than usual both to Hubert and his father who sat on her other side, but so far as he was able to overhear her conversation, the subject of it had no relation to his own plans or doings. Most of her talk seemed to be concerned with Hubert's fiancée, Dorothy Martin.

And Arthur's own attention was continually being distracted by Elizabeth. Never before had she been so ready to flirt with him.

It seemed that she had dressed for the part. She was wearing a gown that he had not seen before, and that was something too elaborate for a family dinner. Her plump, well-developed bust and shoulders emerging with an effect of challenge from a foam of pink chiffon, looked almost startlingly naked. Nevertheless, if it were a trifle theatrical, the dress suited her brunette prettiness, and gave value to the air of vivacity that she had, also, assumed. This was one of Elizabeth's most effective moods. He had seen her pert and rather forward on other occasions but never quite so daring as she was to-night.

Yet he lacked the least inclination to flirt with



her. He recognised her feminine attractions, but they failed to arouse him. Indeed, when he compared her with her cousin, dressed as usual in a soft, simple white frock, he found Elizabeth's forwardness vulgar, almost to him in his present mood repulsive. He responded to the best of his ability, he had no wish to snub her, but he felt that she must be distressingly conscious of her failure to strike fire from him.

Miss Kenyon on his other side gave no indication of cherishing any ill-will against him for having defeated her that morning. He and she rarely talked to each other at the dinner table. They had nothing to say. And to-night her manner discovered no shade of difference from her habitual attitude towards him.

Nevertheless, it was Miss Kenyon who, whether deliberately or not, thwarted him as they were leaving the table. She addressed some unnecessary remark to him as they were getting up, and thus gave Eleanor time to leave the room in front of them. When he was able to escape and follow her into the hall, she was half-way up the stairs.

He paused in the hall, staring after her, and when she reached the second landing he caught her eye for an instant looking down at him. But she turned away again at once, and he had not the courage either to attempt to address her from that distance, or to follow her upstairs.

He avoided Elizabeth when he went into the drawing-room and almost immediately haled Turner out into the billiard-room. Elizabeth did not follow them. No doubt she believed that her attractions had no power over him in his present mood. Arthur himself would have declared that they had not at that moment, and yet little more than an

hour later he was seriously debating whether he would or would not propose to her.

Billiards was a failure so far as he was concerned that evening. He could not get a shot himself and Turner's slick facility began to irritate him. He had to keep himself firmly in hand in order to hide his annoyance. And as the game went on his spirits sank lower and lower into a mood of profound depression.

"You're off your game to-night," Turner commented jauntily, when Arthur rather impatiently refused to play again. "Anything the matter?"

They were alone in the billiard-room—Hubert had not joined them to-night as usual—and Turner suddenly dropped into a mood of confidence.

"Feel a bit doubtful about settling down here?" he went on. "You needn't. We've all passed through that stage, but you soon become reconciled; why shouldn't you? Get everything you can possibly want here except a certain measure of freedom, and no one's really free. It's one sort of slavery or another for every one of us. If I were you, my boy, I'd marry Elizabeth and make up my mind to it. Then you won't be continually on tenterhooks as to whether the old man's going to last one year more or ten."

"Oh! Good Lord!" Arthur gesticulated. "It isn't that. I'm a bit out of sorts, that's all, touch of indigestion, I expect. No need to resort to desperate remedies for that."

Turner smiled. "I won't tell Elizabeth," he commented dryly. "And if you take my advice you'll think it over. Coming back into the other room?"

"No, I've got a letter to write," Arthur said, remembering that Somers would expect an answer

to his main question. "I'll go upstairs, I think, good-night."

He had wanted, savagely, to get away from Turner just then, but when he was upstairs in his bedroom he was oppressed by a sense of loneliness. There was not a single human being in that house in whom he could confide. He had, for instance, to write to Somers; he had to say that there was no chance of his returning to Peckham, and although he had given his promise and had really no option, he would have liked to talk it over with some one before making an irrevocable decision. Had not Turner been right after all? If Elizabeth was willing to marry him, would not her companionship alleviate the occasional tediousness and loneliness of life at Hartling? If they were married they might become friends. It was impossible to be on terms of real confidence with a girl of that sort until you were married to her. She was always too conscious of her sex and doubtful about your intentions.

Now that he came to think of it, she had certainly looked very tempting in that pink frock. She was one of the prettiest girls he had ever known—though she might run to flesh in a few years' time.

He got up from the table at which he had been sitting before a still virgin sheet of Hartling note-paper, and began to walk up and down the room. How familiar, even commonplace, that room had become to him, he reflected. A few weeks ago it had been a delicious enticement, a thing ardently desired. But he would have missed it horribly if he had had to go back to Peckham. Would his marriage with Elizabeth produce a like development of sensation, beginning with enticements and ardent luxuries that would gradually become fa-

miliar, a matter of habit? He was not in love with her, but he might be when he knew her better. At present he knew absolutely nothing about her inner life. They had never talked about anything but games for more than a minute at a time. . . .

One thing was certain, he must write that letter and announce his decision. No other had been possible. Apart from his promise to Mr Kenyon, no sane man would hesitate a moment between the alternatives of Hartling and Peckham. He would ask Somers to recommend him some modern works on surgery. He would not allow himself to rust, although it was the practical experience that was most useful. Still, he would get that in hospital—later. No one could say how long he would have to wait, but Fergusson had been talking through his hat when he had said that the old man would probably outlive him. Fergusson was good for at least another ten or fifteen years, probably more; and people did not live to over a hundred. Give the old man five years at the outside. He would probably collapse quite suddenly at the end.

But suppose, just for the sake of argument, that the old man left him, Arthur, nothing after all? No! he would not consider that. It was disloyal. He had had what amounted to a promise from him, and in common justice some compensation would have to be made for taking the best years of his life. The very fact that he was getting no salary was a guarantee—an absolute guarantee. Old Kenyon might have various eccentricities, they were only to be expected at his age, but he was a good sort, and if anything a shade too impartial in his administration of justice.

And then, what about the idea of marrying Elizabeth if she would have him? He walked over

to the window and leaned out. It was raining again, a light, steady rain. It looked as if they might be in for a lot of rain. Getting engaged to and marrying Elizabeth would be something to do, an excitement that would be a pleasant change from golf, billiards, croquet, and tennis. Should he go down now and try his luck? She had looked rather ripping in that pink frock. He would be able to put more ardour into his proposal when she was dressed like that. And, unless she had changed since dinner, she was in just the right mood.

Still leaning out of the window, he began to picture the proposal. He saw himself alone with Elizabeth somewhere—he might make some excuse to take her into the library—and then, beginning to overcome her levity and caprice by his earnestness—he would say that he had been in love with her from the first, but that he had been afraid to tell her—no prospects—that sort of thing. He imagined her becoming suddenly serious, reciprocating his seriousness, confessing that she, too, had always—liked him. They would be quite close together when she admitted that, and he would put his arms round her waist or over her shoulders—she had lovely shoulders—and kiss her. . . .

He came back into the room at that point of his dream and began to walk impatiently up and down. It was very queer, he couldn't in any way account for it; but he did not in the least want to kiss Elizabeth. He had just done the thing in imagination, very vividly and realistically, and it had not stirred him in the least degree. On the contrary, it had produced a sense of being mean and contemptible. He had often kissed girls in the past, and had always liked doing it. Did he feel like that now because Elizabeth was in a different class

of life, or because that kiss would be the seal of his engagement to her? He conjured up the image of her as he had seen her that night at dinner, held it before him and studied it. No, the whole truth of the matter was that he did not want to kiss her, and that was the end of it. She was not, for some reason or other, his sort.

He would now write his letter to Somers, and then go to bed.

To-morrow he might make an opportunity to have that talk with Eleanor. He would like her to understand his reasons for staying on at Hartling. She ought to know that, as he had just written to Somers, he meant to go in for a serious course of study. . . .

He could not conjure up the image of Eleanor at will, for some reason, but sometimes it came unexpectedly with amazing vividness when he was not thinking of her—some such picture of her as her swift glance down at him in the hall when she had been going upstairs that evening.

**X**





## X

THE arrangements for breakfast at Hartling were in keeping with Arthur's early estimate of the place as a first-class hotel. The members of the family came down when they chose, and between eight and ten o'clock there were rarely more than two people in the breakfast-room at the same time. Miss Kenyon and Hubert came first. Hubert had a habit of getting up at six in the summer, and Miss Kenyon was a precisian. Arthur succeeded them between half-past eight and nine and sometimes had his aunt for a companion. The other four straggled in uncertainly—Joe Kenyon or his sister was always the last—and occasionally their meals overlapped. So much Arthur knew from experience, and as he had never seen Eleanor in the morning, he had inferred that she probably breakfasted with her grandfather upstairs.

He was greatly surprised, therefore, to find her at the table when he entered the room at half-past eight the next morning, surprised and for a minute or two distinctly embarrassed. He was never now in the mood for conversation so early in the day.

Until he had come to Hartling he had always been fresh and eager in the morning, but the Kenyons were taciturn and inclined to be irritable at that time, and by degrees their example had influenced him. He presumed that it was their example, but he was not sure whether or not he could attribute to the same source the sense of dissatisfaction with himself that commonly haunted

him now when he first woke; dissatisfaction and a strange feeling of staleness and of disinclination to begin his easy, amusing day.

He addressed her as he might have addressed a casual acquaintance in a hotel.

"Don't often see you down here in the morning," he remarked rapidly, as he rang the bell.

"I've been given a holiday to-day," she said, without looking up. "And I was to tell you that you needn't go up this morning. My grandfather says he's feeling a little tired."

"He had rather an exciting day," Arthur agreed; investigated the cold dishes on the sideboard, and then crossed the room and sat down opposite her.

Eleanor went on quietly with her breakfast. She seemed prepared, he thought, to sit there in silence for the rest of the meal, while he on his part could think of no reasonably intelligent conversation. After the interval provided by the entrance of the butler, however, an opening presented itself to him.

"What are you going to do with your holiday?" he asked. "It'll be rather too wet for tennis, won't it?"

"I'm going for a long walk into Sussex," she said.

His first thought was that he would now find no opportunity for a quiet talk alone with her that day.

"All alone?" he asked.

"I long to be alone, sometimes," she murmured.

"It seems to me that you spend most of your time alone," he said. "We don't see much of you." She looked up at him with an expression that seemed to indicate both surprise and disappointment. "One can never be alone in the house," she said.

He did not understand. "Are you always with your grandfather?" he asked.

She shook her head and looked down again at her plate, as she said, "I meant that I couldn't think my own thoughts here."

"And what do you think about when you're out all by yourself in Sussex?" he inquired. He felt that his tone was not right, that it held a suggestion of the jocular; but he felt shy and ill at ease, afraid of being too serious.

"Just my own thoughts," she said quietly.

He wanted to say something rather profound to show that he understood and sympathised, but every sentence he tried over in his mind appeared trivial and banal. He kept his head down as he muttered finally. "I've often wondered what you think about things."

She made no reply to that, and he was afraid to look at her. His speech had sounded rather surly, he thought, and with the idea of amending it, he continued, "I mean that every one seems to take things for granted here, except you."

"What sort of things?" she asked in a low voice.

"Oh, well! speculations about life in general," he tried.

"Yes, I don't think any of us are much given to that sort of thing," she replied.

There had been some effect of a smile in her tone as she spoke, and he looked up and saw that she was indeed smiling, if a trifle ruefully.

"Not even you?" he asked.

She disregarded the implied flattery that distinguished her from all the other members of the family. "Have you done much speculating about life in general since *you've* been here?" she returned.

He had hardly begun his breakfast yet, but he laid his napkin on the table and pushed back his chair. "I wish you would let me come with you

to-day," he said. "There are a heap of things I want to talk to you about. I know you don't like me, but it would be a real kindness if you would let me talk to you a little sometimes. There's simply no one here I can explain things to."

"Why me?" she replied.

"You're so different from all the others," he said.

"And are you?" she asked.

"Different from the others?" he repeated, staggered by the suggestion that he could be thought to resemble, in any particular, the other members of the Hartling circle.

"Yes," she prompted him quietly.

He stared at her frowning. "Am I the least like them?" he inquired with a faint trepidation in his voice.

"Not yet, perhaps; but you will be," she said.

"But they aren't like each other," he remonstrated. "Which of them shall I be like if I stay long enough, Uncle Joe, or Mr Turner, or Hubert . . . ?"

"Aren't they all rather alike in one way?" she asked.

He saw at once that they were; that there was some characteristic common to every one of them, even Miss Kenyon. Seen as individuals they were as different from each other as are the ears of wheat in a cornfield, but they all bowed the same way to the prevailing wind. In their attitude towards the head of the house they could all be relied upon to present the same face.

"But you've been here fourteen years," he said, "and you're still different. Or do you think it takes longer than that to get assimilated?"

"I'm not different," she replied. "Or I shouldn't be here still."

"Of course, I don't know you," he said. "I've hardly seen you since the first three or four days I was here. But—well—I can't agree with you about that."

She just perceptibly shrugged her shoulders.

"You haven't said whether you will let me come with you on your walk," he began again, after a short pause.

"I would sooner you didn't," she told him. "It can't do any good. There can be nothing new that you want to ask my advice about. I said all I had to say to you about that five weeks ago, and you took no notice. I can only repeat what I said then."

"But I can't go now," he protested. "I've given my promise. I made a sort of bargain in fact."

She shook her head impatiently. "You needn't keep it," she said.

"That's absurd," he remonstrated, getting to his feet. "Of course I must keep my promise in any circumstances."

"I suppose you do really believe that?" she asked, looking up at him. "Would you keep it just the same, for instance, if you knew for certain that it meant staying on here for ten years and getting nothing, absolutely nothing, at the end of it? Would you, honestly? Or don't you think you'd ask to be let off?"

"I might ask to be let off," he admitted, after a few seconds' thought.

"Then you'll only be keeping your promise or bargain or whatever it is because you want to stay—or because you've got to," she said.

"Perhaps," he agreed. "But I've never said that I *didn't* want to stay. I do."

She sighed. "Precisely, and now we're back again

to what I said just now. Whatever is the good of talking to *me* about it?"

"We might talk about other things," he suggested. "I should very much like to get away, too, for a few hours."

She hid her face in her hands, leaning her elbows on the table, and he waited patiently for her answer.

"Why don't you finish your breakfast?" she asked, when she looked up after what seemed to him a long interval of silence.

"I have. I don't want anything more," he said.

She got up then, and he thought she was going to leave him without deigning to take any further notice of his request, but when she was half-way across the room, she looked back and said, "Can you be ready in ten minutes?"

He started forward with the eagerness of a dog beckoned by its mistress. "Do you really mean that?" he asked, hardly understanding his own excitement.

She stood still regarding him with an expression that was half-amused and half-disdainful. "I didn't know you were so keen on long walks," she remarked, "or on getting away from here. Isn't this rather a new departure for you?"

The look of eagerness left his face. "Perhaps it is," he said stiffly. "And it's hardly likely to be much of a success if—if you're going to take that sort of tone."

"I told you that I didn't want you to come," she replied, and there was something of defiance in her tone and in the pose of her firm, upright figure.

"I should at least like to know why you have taken such a dislike to me," he said. "But you might not feel inclined to tell me that in any case."

"Oh! dislike," she responded, almost contemptuously. "That's much too strong a word."

He had a sense of hopeless frustration. All her half-unwilling responses appeared now to have been nothing more than a condescension to his ineptitude. And he was all too horribly conscious of the fact that he deserved nothing better than her contemptuous opinion of him. He was just an average young man of twenty-eight. He had done nothing that thousands of other young men had not done as well or better. The only boast he could have made would have been that of ambition, a boast that was no longer possible for him after his recent admission that he meant to stay on at Hartling and liked being there. He knew intuitively what her reply would be, if he told her that he meant to study, to prepare himself for the work of a specialist. Indeed, he himself saw that project, now, as little more than a fatuous piece of self-deception. Practice was what he wanted: book-work would be no good without that. And in five years he would be soft and over-fed; his nerve would be gone.

He looked down and began to trace the pattern of the carpet with his toe. "Yes, I'm not worth hating," he muttered.

She turned away with a gesture of impatience. "Well, shall you be ready in ten minutes?" she threw at him over her shoulder.

"But if you would so much sooner I didn't come. . ." he conceded humbly.

"I'll meet you in the hall," she said, as she went out.

He hesitated again while he was putting on his shoes. If she merely despised him, as she obviously did, what was the use of trying to win her confidence? Nothing he could say or do would alter

her opinion of him. He had nothing to say. There was nothing he could do. The most he could hope for would be to defend his position by argument. He had little doubt that her contempt for him was based on the fact that he had consented to stay on at Hartling; and it might be well that she had not, as yet, a proper understanding of his reasons. She might not have heard of his verbal compact with the family made the previous day? Was it worth while attempting his own defence?

He was still weighing that question when she joined him in the hall. He continued to weigh it as they walked together in silence down the length of the garden.

The clouds were lifting, and before they reached the big gates the sun broke through. He looked up, noted the promise of a hot, fine day, and his spirits began to rise. What did it matter whether or not she despised him? He was a free man. He was not in any way dependent upon her opinion. If she chose to snub him, he could leave her to continue her walk alone. He could be perfectly happy without her. He was twenty-eight, in perfect health, and without a care in the world. Why shouldn't he enjoy life in his own way? If he had a regret at that moment, it was that he had eaten hardly any breakfast.

He began to whistle softly under his breath. He had no intention of beginning the conversation. He was content to enjoy the day and the adventure of this walk—the first he had undertaken since he had come to Hartling. Except for the path to the links and the links themselves, he knew nothing of the country round about. None of the family ever seemed to bother about going outside the



grounds. They had this amazing garden and were, presumably, satisfied with that.

How little Eleanor was satisfied with it, however, was shown the moment they passed through the gates into the dusty high-road. She set back her shoulders, lifted her head, and gave a sigh of relief. "It's going to be fine, after all," she said. "I think we'll strike across country to a place I know where we can look right over to the South Downs. It's so big and open there."

There was no hint of embarrassment or restraint in her manner. She might have forgotten everything that had passed between them that morning; and Arthur, on his side, was quite willing to postpone his arguments and explanations, or even to omit them altogether. If she were going to treat him decently for the time being, that was all he asked.

"Sounds jolly," he said.

"It's seven or eight miles," she warned him.

"Oh! that's nothing," he returned. "I'm good for all that and more. But are *you*?"

"I've done it twice in the last ten days," she said.

"This holiday of yours is not altogether an exception to the general rule, then?" he asked.

"I've been out several times—lately," she admitted.

He thought he detected the suggestion of some reservation in her answer, and said, "Only lately? Do you mean that this is a new freedom for you?"

She manifestly hesitated before she replied to that, and her "Oh, no! not new exactly," still left him in doubt as to what was in her mind.

They had left the main road now, and were walking in an olive-green twilight along a deep, narrow

lane, its banks lush with fern luxuriating in the warm shade afforded by high banks, topped by hornbeam and hazel hedges that nearly met overhead.

Arthur lifted his hat, and wiped his forehead. "It's exactly like being in a hothouse down here," he said. "Rather ripping though."

"We shall come out on to the common a few yards farther on," Eleanor replied. "It's almost too hot to talk here, isn't it?"

He conceded that, but when they had walked on in silence for fifty yards or so she suddenly said, "I know I'm not being honest with you, but I will be presently, even if it does mean talking about things I would so much sooner forget. Forgetting isn't being honest, even with oneself. Only not till we're right out in the open if you don't mind."

"Of course I don't mind," Arthur responded warmly. "And I'd like you to do exactly what you want to about—being honest. If you'd sooner not talk about the other affair, we won't."

She nodded her agreement, but he was uncertain whether or not she meant to revert to Hartling as a topic of conversation when they were "in the open." And, when presently they came out on to the common, it seemed that she was still skirting that topic, for she began to talk about the war.

"I was only fifteen when it began," she said, in answer to some comment of Arthur's. "And I really didn't understand all that it meant until it was nearly over. My grandfather used to keep the papers away from me, and told my governess—Elizabeth and I shared a governess then—not to tell us about it. But we all shirked it; tried to pretend that we couldn't do anything. And in a way it never touched us. Hubert would have gone

if my grandfather had let him, and at that time I thought Hubert was being silly about it." She paused and drew in her breath with an effect of lamenting her own blindness.

"But you couldn't have helped if you'd known, you, personally, I mean," Arthur said.

"I might have been a nurse," she protested.

"If you had you couldn't have come in till right at the end," he returned, "and, Lord, we had quite enough amateurs at that game as it was. Though, as it happens, it crossed my mind that you would make a good nurse the first time I saw you."

"I believe I should, too," she agreed. "I hope I may be some day."

He made no comment on that though he was aware that something within him resented the thought of her ever becoming a professional nurse.

"You *did* go through the war, at all events," she went on, rather as if she sought an excuse for him.

"I, and about five million other men," he put in, determined to take no credit on that score.

"It makes a difference, all the same," she returned.

"To what?" he asked.

"Oh! everything comes back to the same place," she said, looking out straight in front of her. "I knew it would, when you asked to come with me. When I'm alone I'm dishonest enough to forget—deliberately. I can—generally. I lose myself in other thoughts."

"Meaning that I'm spoiling your day," he put in. "But I don't see why we should talk about—*that*—if you'd sooner not. I can forget too.

"No, no, we *must* talk about it," she said, "only I find it so difficult to begin. There are some things

—one thing at all events that you don't know and that I find it very hard to tell you. But let's wait until after lunch. You had no breakfast, and I know a funny little lost place on our way, where we can get something to eat. It won't be anything but ham and eggs, and bread and cheese, of course."

Arthur felt that he wanted nothing better just then, and said so.

"Afterwards," she concluded, "we will go to that place where you look across to the South Downs, and—and—have it all out."

He was quite content with that. Whatever "having it all out" might portend, she was treating him now frankly and with a certain confidence. Her manner since they had left Hartling behind them, had completely changed. She might presently criticise him in a way that he would find intolerable. They might openly quarrel. But anything would be better to endure than that air of contempt and reserve she had displayed at breakfast. He would, at least, be given the opportunity to defend himself. He felt sure that she had not understood his attitude, as yet.

Their immediate difficulty was to find a topic of conversation that would avoid any kind of reference to the affairs of Hartling, and a few experiments further demonstrated how the thought of those affairs was, just then, obsessing them to the exclusion of all other interests. All that seemed possible were disjointed scraps of comment upon the scenery, or the wild flowers and ferns of that luxuriant Sussex country—until they reached Eleanor's little wayside inn, and could drop into the familiar interchanges of two rather hungry young people awaiting the inevitable fried ham and eggs that was being prepared for them.

The inn lay in a valley, and as soon as they finished their meal, Eleanor pointed to the hill in front of them.

"We have to climb that and then we are there," she said. "Shall we go now?"

Arthur agreed willingly enough. He was both eager and apprehensive; at once anxious to hear what she had to say and a little fearful of the effect. So long as they could walk together in silence he had a pleasant feeling of content in her company. Surely she liked him better since they had been alone together? She had not given the least sign of despising him in the course of the past two hours.

Yet even when they had reached the summit of the hill that marked the limit of their journey, Eleanor still hesitated.

She was sitting on the grass, leaning a little backward and supporting herself on the out-thrown struts of her arms and hands. Arthur lay on the ground a few feet away from her. Both of them were looking out across the weald to the broad, blue contours of the South Downs that determined their horizon, and hid the foundations of the massed and shining range of cumulus, slowly setting beyond. A light, cool wind was blowing up from the invisible sea, and the heat of the early July sun was screened by a thin veil of haze that trailed an immense scarf of almost transparent cloud across the sky.

Arthur was enjoying a sense of great comfort. He wanted neither to move nor to speak, and he seemed to be aware that Eleanor's inclination ran with his own. Yet he knew that the crisis could not be much longer postponed. If they merely enjoyed their pleasant idleness and returned to Hartling without having approached the important

issue that had been impending ever since he had made his decision on the previous day, they would only continue in their present impossible relations. What the alternative might be he could not guess, though he had a premonition that it would not, in any case, be entirely agreeable. Some conflict was inevitable, and it must be faced. It might well be, he thought, that here on this Sussex hill, he would be confronted with a choice that would prove the turning point of his whole life.

They had sat there in absolute silence for more than ten minutes when Arthur at last said,—

“Well, shall we talk now and—and get it over?”

She did not change her position nor turn her gaze from the distances of the South Downs as she replied,—

“We will talk, but you mustn’t think that we can ever ‘get it over.’ It will go on just the same—perhaps for years and years.”

“In one sense, perhaps,” he admitted, his eyes admiringly intent on her steady profile; “but it will get over this—this misunderstanding between you and me, I hope.”

“It may,” she said; “but you don’t in the least understand yet. You don’t understand, for instance, that after this, either you or I will have to leave Hartling.”

He sat up with a start of surprise, and moved a little nearer to her. “But, good Lord; *why?*” he asked in a voice that sufficiently expressed the depth of his incomprehension.

“Because of that thing you don’t know,” she said, still without turning her head; “because my grandfather wants to—to throw us together.” And then, having unburdened herself of this difficult essential, she continued quickly before he had time to reply,

"That's why I've been given so many holidays lately, though that isn't my chief reason for knowing. Not that that matters, does it? I do know for certain; never mind how. And I have known, oh! for a month or more, though he has never said a word to me directly. So you see now, don't you, that that's a fact which makes all the difference to our talk, and how impossible it was for me to say anything to you until you knew it too?"

He waited for a few seconds after she had finished before he said quietly, "I ought to have guessed really; but I didn't. He said something to me about it yesterday morning—that he had hoped you and I would be friends, or something of the sort."

"And you, what did you say?" she put in.

"I told him that I was afraid you didn't like me, and then he said that in that case there was nothing more to be done. We didn't mention it again. It was before I told him about Hubert."

"Though, whether I like you or not has nothing whatever to do with it, of course," she commented thoughtfully.

"Hasn't it?" he asked, as if he doubted that inference.

"Nothing whatever," she insisted.

"Still if—I mean—it seems to me that . . ." he began; but she cut him short by saying with an impatient lift of her chin,—

"I know what you mean, perfectly well. You needn't try to put it into words. That isn't really the point at all."

"What is the point then?" he asked in bewilderment. "I may be frightfully stupid, but I can't quite see . . ."

She turned her face still farther away from him

as she said in a scarcely audible voice, "Nothing should ever induce me to be a bait for you."

A bait! He saw in a flash the peculiar implications of the word she had used, but hesitated to accept them.

"You can't mean that Mr Kenyon has deliberately tried to—throw us together, in order to keep me in the house?" he urged, his tone apologising for the unlikelihood of such a wild deduction.

"Of course I mean that," she returned bitterly.

"But why?" he pressed her. "Why should he want to keep me as much as all that?"

"He does," she said, and then as he was manifestly still doubtful, continued, "I can't tell you why. I don't know. I only know that he wants to keep us all there till he dies. But you—you were different. I wondered when he first invited you what he meant to do. There was something I disliked, instinctively, in the way he asked about you. It was just as if he—he was trying to catch you then. And when I saw you that first night I tried to warn you. I daren't say very much. We none of us dare because we know that he's—oh! inhuman in a way; that he would turn any one of us out to-morrow without a penny if he thought that we were working against him.

"Oh! surely not," Arthur protested.

She laughed scornfully. "He seems to have made you believe in him," she said.

"He has been most frightfully decent to me, you see," Arthur replied emphatically.

"Did he say anything to you about my father yesterday?" she asked, turning to face him for the first time.

"Something," he acknowledged.

"Did he tell you how my father pleaded with



him, offered to do or to be anything, if only he might be allowed to marry my mother?"

Arthur shook his head. "No, he didn't tell me that. What was his objection?" he said.

"My father never knew—unless it was that my mother had no money of her own. I only know what Uncle Joe told me, of course, but he heard all about it at the time. I don't believe that he had any real objection. You can never be sure whether he will say yes or no to anything, but you may be quite certain whichever it is, that he will stick to it afterwards whatever happens. And he said 'No' to my father, and turned him out of the house because he was willing to give up anything in the world rather than my mother. And when he had been gone about a month he sent that elephant's foot that stands in the hall. He meant it as an insult. Uncle Joe says that they were afraid to tell him. They all knew what it meant, of course; that it was a sort of symbol of his methods. But he wasn't the least bit insulted. He seemed to be proud of it, and had it put where it is now, for every one to see."

She had been speaking rapidly, almost fiercely, with an excitement completely unlike her usual rather staid manner.

"But why have you gone on staying there if you feel like that?" Arthur asked.

She put her hands up to her face for a moment and then looked at him with a whimsical smile. "You aren't the only person who has been blind," she said.

"Do you mean that you have only been feeling like that just lately?" he asked.

"I was only seven when I came," she said, "and I was brought up there. I never went to school.

And you take things for granted when you're brought up in a place because it's the only world you know, and you think the others must be much about the same. I did begin to wake up a little in the last year of the war, but even then it all seemed natural enough in a way. He was so old, and one made all sorts of excuses for him. And then, of course, for months or even years at a time he seems to be as sweet and gentle as any one could be. He can be most awfully kind to people. . . ." She paused on a reflective note, as if she still sought excuses for him.

"But what happened to make you change your mind just lately?" Arthur prompted her.

She blushed vividly, and again turned her eyes towards the lavender distances of the downs. "I've really seen the thing happening for myself," she said in a low voice. "I'd had hints from Uncle Joe before, plenty of them; but like you I didn't believe them. There was more excuse for me. I had been brought up with it. I believed he was odd, eccentric. He might seem rather cruel sometimes; but I thought, as I suppose you do still, that he was really trying to do the best for every one."

"But you don't now?" Arthur asked.

"I've been watching him—and thinking—since you came," she said slowly, hesitating between her phrases. "And it has seemed—as if I had got the key of a puzzle that had been worrying me. It—it worked. It accounted for so much that had been just a little mysterious. I have had, sometimes, a horrid feeling of uneasiness and have been angry with myself for doubting him. But after you came—I suppose it was just an accident that it was connected with you, more particularly; it would have been just the same with any one else, of course—well

after that, as I said just now, I saw it all happening."

She paused, but Arthur made no reply. He was leaning on his elbow looking down over the broken sweep of the weald. For him, the "key" of which she had spoken was not yet plain. There were traits in the character of the old man, that Arthur believed were not consistent with Eleanor's judgment of him as "inhuman."

His mind was busy with the search for excuses and extenuations, when Eleanor began in a new voice, "I suppose you think it very rotten of me to have said all that about him, and, in any case, you don't believe me."

"I do; I do," Arthur protested, rousing himself from his abstraction. "I don't think it's rotten of you in the very least. What I'm doubting is whether your deductions are sound."

She appeared now to have given up any hope of persuading him, and looked at him with a frank smile as she said, "Well, I suppose we ought to be setting our faces towards home?"

"Oh, no! not yet," Arthur replied, with such evident distress in his voice that she laughed outright.

"But surely you must be pining to get back to your golf and billiards and croquet?" she suggested. "Or, if we start now, we might get in some tennis after tea."

"I don't believe I have ever heard you laugh before to-day," was Arthur's answer.

"It isn't exactly a gay house, is it?" she replied.

"My Lord, no, it isn't," Arthur agreed, after a moment's reflection; "though I don't think I'd thought of it like that before. Elizabeth always laughs as if she had been wound up inside and set

going, and none of the others really laugh at all. Certainly Hubert doesn't. I wonder if Miss Martin will?"

Eleanor's face grew grave again. "Oh! the poor dear," she exclaimed. "She'll probably get my job."

"Your job?" Arthur ejaculated. "But you're not going to give it up, are you?"

She smiled tolerantly. "Didn't I begin by saying that?" she reminded him. "Either you or I will have to go, and it's quite clear that you can't."

"Can't?" he repeated "If *you* go . . ."

She gave him no time to complete his sentence. "As you pointed out this morning," she put in quickly, "you've promised to stay. My conscience is clear of promises, at any rate."

"But, good Lord, where could you *go to*? What could you do?" he remonstrated.

"I could go to the Paynes," she said, "the people who brought me over from Rio. He has retired from the Cable Company and they're living at a place called Northwood, somewhere near London, I think. I couldn't stay with them indefinitely, of course, but they would help me to get something to do. I'm quite well educated for a commercial career. Grandfather didn't want me to learn type-writing and shorthand, but he's glad now, because they're so useful to him. *My* job isn't a sinecure, you know. I do really work quite hard. You'd be surprised what a big correspondence my grandfather has about his money affairs. And then I've got French, and I can read German, though I write it rather badly. I should think I ought to be worth about three pounds a week."

"Oh, no!" Arthur exclaimed in despair. He could not endure the thought of her working in a city office.

"But oh, yes!" she said. "I was thinking about it all before you came. The war made me dissatisfied. We none of us did anything, and I couldn't help feeling what empty, useless lives we were living here."

"I don't see that you'd be doing anything more by working for a millionaire in the city than by working for Mr Kenyon," Arthur put in.

"I know. That weighed with me," she agreed. "What I really want is to be a nurse. Only I don't quite know how to begin. But you can tell me about that, can't you?"

He pushed her inquiry on one side. "I can't see," he said, "why either you or I have to leave. I can't really."

She had been talking to him freely, almost gaily, but now her manner took on the air of constraint with which she had begun the conversation.

"Need we go back to that?" she asked.

"Why, of course we must," he said in an aggrieved tone. "As far as I can see that's what we came out to talk about."

"But we settled it," she returned. "I'm going!"

"And if I went? If I broke my promise and went instead, would you stay?"

"I might for the sake of the others," she said. "I do help them a little. And in spite of everything, I'm sorry for him—for that wicked old man upstairs." She dropped her voice and looked down at her clasped hands as she concluded, "He is wicked, although you may not believe it."

"Even so," Arthur argued, choosing to ignore that point for the moment, "I don't in the least understand why my going should make any difference one way or the other."

She bent her head a little lower as she said, "No

doubt it's very quixotic and sentimental of me, but I can't bear to watch your life being ruined. It's different with the others. They're so helpless. Hubert is not fit to earn his own living, and Ken—if he comes—would probably be safer there than he would in town. He is very wild. If he comes, he'll probably marry Elizabeth and settle down."

Arthur saw that at last the time had come to set out his defence. "Yes, but why take it for granted that I should be wasting my life?" he began, and then, with one or two pauses at first, but gathering confidence in his own argument as he went on, he laid before her his plans for studying at Hartling and his hope for the future.

She listened to him attentively, attempting no comment, either by word or gesture until he had finished. He believed that he had convinced her, until she said gently,—

"And if my grandfather lives more than five years? What then?"

"He can't," Arthur expostulated. "People don't live as long as that."

"A few do," she said, "I saw in one of the papers a day or two ago, that Miss Spurgeon, the preacher's aunt, would be one hundred and one next month."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "Frightfully exceptional case," he muttered.

"This might be a frightfully exceptional case, too," she insisted. "You don't find anything wrong with him, do you? And he lives such a sheltered, detached sort of life. Nothing ever upsets him. He hasn't altered the least little bit, all the years I have known him. And you know, don't you, that thirty years ago it began in just the same way with the others? They thought that he wouldn't live

more than five years, or ten at the outside." She could not look at him, as she concluded gently, "Don't waste your life as they've done. Anything would be better than that."

He saw it all quite clearly. He knew that she was right. But something within him continued to protest fiercely against her advice. He could no longer doubt that she was entirely disinterested. He was consoled, even a trifle flattered, by the fact that she so evidently desired his welfare. But he didn't want to leave Hartling, and he feverishly sought excuses for staying. He could find half a dozen that would satisfy himself, but he knew them for sophistries and dared not put them into words.

She, on her side, seemed disinclined to add anything to what she had already said, and for some minutes they sat in silence. Eleanor returned to her study of the distant downs and Arthur, with his head in his hands, furiously sought an escape from the dilemma imposed by her two alternatives.

It was Eleanor who at last broke the long silence. "I must be going now," she said—sighed, rose to her feet, and began to brush and shake the grass from her skirt. "There is absolutely nothing more to be said," she continued, "and in any case we shall have plenty of time to say it on the way back."

He nodded rather resentfully and followed a pace or two behind her as they made their way down the hill. He could not as yet overcome the feeling that it was "hard lines" on him to be sent away from Hartling. For that was what it all amounted to. *He* would have to go—promise or no promise. He could not possibly allow her to get work in some city office, or enter herself as probationer at a hospital, while he idled away his time at Hartling.

Also he hated the thought of her mixing either with city clerks or young medical students. They were a coarse lot, and she would certainly meet with all kinds of beastly advances. In imagination he could hear the men at the hospital talking about her among themselves, and his face burnt with anger, first at the intolerable familiarities of his hypothetical students, and then with himself for thinking these thoughts in connection with her. Still she would know how to protect herself. No one could be more aloof and cold than she was sometimes. If that warm generosity of hers did not betray her? Those silly young fools at the hospital would not understand. They . . . He found a relief in mentally cursing the particular type of young medical student he had all too vividly pictured. He saw himself taking one of them by the throat and choking the life out of him.

No, it was obvious that in no circumstances whatever, could she be permitted to face that kind of life. Plenty of nice girls did, of course; but she was different. And a city office would be just as bad, or worse. It was impossible to imagine her mixing with a crowd of dirty little Cockney clerks or greasy business men. Damn them.

After all, Peckham would not be so bad. Somers was one of the best and would be tremendously glad to hear that he was coming back. Only—that would be the end, so far as any hope of seeing Eleanor was concerned—until the old man died—and it was perfectly true, as she had said, that he might be an example of one of those exceptional cases of longevity. He saw the probability more clearly now that his interest was more detached. Up there at the house, they were compelled to cheat themselves with the belief that it could not last



much longer. Life would not be endurable without that hope. They had been living on it, some of them, for forty years. . . .

He suddenly awoke to the fact that this might be the last time he would be alone with Eleanor and that he was wasting it in these perfectly detestable reflections, when he might be talking to her.

"I've made up my mind," he said, quickening his pace to catch her up. "I'll go. You're quite right. I can't stay there now."

She looked up at him with a hint of question in her face.

"I couldn't stand the thought of your going into a hospital or an office," he continued. "You've no idea of the sort of thing that you have to put up with and the people that you have to mix with; no idea."

"Oh! but I don't want you to go in order to save *me*," she exclaimed.

"But *you'd* go to save *me*," he returned.

She gave a little protesting laugh. "No, I shouldn't save you if I went," she said. "You would stay on here then. All I said was that I would not be used as an influence to make you stay. You remember what I told you about my grandfather's plans. Well, sooner than that, I'd do anything. It's purely selfish, I admit that. I don't mind your being ruined, you see, but I won't take any sort of responsibility for it."

"But in that case," he submitted. "I might stop on for a time at all events, if it was quite certain that *you* weren't the case of my staying."

"No, no; don't begin like that," she broke out passionately. "Once you begin to procrastinate and find excuses there'll be no end to it. That must have been how they all began."

"You're evidently most frightfully anxious to get rid of me," he grumbled. He had seen a ray of hope and resented her instant extinction of it.

"Oh! don't be so babyish!" she said petulantly. "You must know that it hasn't anything to do with getting rid of you."

"I don't see what else it can be," he returned sulkily.

She shrugged her shoulders but attempted no other answer, and they did not speak again until they were back in the deep, overhung lane and within half a mile of Hartling. It was there that he made his last effort.

"Would it be risking too much if I stayed on for just one more week?" he asked. His spurt of temper had evaporated and he was once more humble, conciliating.

"Why a week?" she replied doubtfully.

He braced himself to make the test he had been considering for the last half-hour. "I should like to have one more talk with you before I go."

"And you wouldn't say anything to my grandfather in the meanwhile?"

"No. If I did he might sling me out."

"You believe he'd do that, then?"

"Oh, yes! I believe that."

"But not that he is—inhuman?"

"I find it difficult. No, I can't credit that."

"But you *would* stick to your idea of going at the end of a week from now?"

"Absolutely."

"I wonder if it's wise to let you stay a week?" she murmured half to herself.

"Seven days surely can't make any difference," he pleaded.

"Exactly; so why have them?" she returned.

"No difference so far as my prospects are concerned," he said.

"Oh, no!" she replied quickly, as if she were afraid that he might go on to elaborate his reasons for wanting his week's grace. "But are you quite sure of yourself? Are you sure that at the end of the week you won't want to put it off again?"

"I give you my word of honour," he said solemnly, and went on, "I've made up my mind. I'll write to Somers as soon as I get in and tell him to expect me next Tuesday."

They reached the gates of Hartling as he was speaking, and automatically they both paused as if this agreement were one that must necessarily be made outside that enclosure.

"Very well," she said, and gave him her hand.

He took it and held it as he replied. "And that other favour? You haven't granted it yet. Will you give me at least one more chance to talk to you alone before I go?"

"Oh! you're sure to have that," she said lightly.

"But will you promise?"

"If you like," she agreed.

It was as they were walking up the garden that they decided upon the necessity for keeping the news of his departure from the rest of the family. Some sense of freedom had left them as they passed through the gates, and already Arthur was beginning to wonder at the comparative ease with which he had made his decision to leave Hartling. Now that he was back again in the garden that had become so familiar to him in the course of the last five weeks he felt again the lure of its shelter. The place was so secure, so rich with the promise of comfort and rest, of freedom from all the struggles

and responsibilities of the world. Probably none of the Kenyons had ever wanted to leave it (Hubert was happy enough now that he was going to marry Dorothy Martin. If he were offered £5000 to go to Canada with her, he probably would not take it). They pretended to be imprisoned, played with the idea of having ambitions. It was a sort of boasting. No doubt they wanted their jailor to die. He stood between them and the semblance of freedom. But when he was dead and they were independent, they would almost certainly go on living there just as they were doing now. They wouldn't want to change their habits after all these years.

It was amazing how differently he saw the problem, now that he was back again within the enclosure of those protecting walls.

Nevertheless, he wrote to Somers, even giving him the time of the train by which he might be expected on the following Tuesday. He was, he thought, being rather quixotic, but he meant to keep his promise to Eleanor, and ask to be released from the one he had made to the old man. And if that release were denied, what could he do? Insist? Say calmly that he meant to go whether he were released or not? Allow the old man to regard him as an ungrateful cad? Or make Eleanor bear witness? Make a clean breast of everything and say that one or the other of them had to go, and he preferred that it should be himself, for excellent reasons? It was just possible that they might both be turned out if the old man knew that they had been plotting against him as it were. On the other hand, he might suggest that the difficulty could be overcome—in another way.

Arthur jumped to his feet and began to pace

fiercely up and down his bedroom. Lord, if only that had been possible, what a difference it might have made. She had been kind enough to him while they were out together. He had some reason to believe that she did not, after all, really dislike him. But it was absolutely futile to hope that she would ever marry him. He was not good enough for her. She was the sort of woman who would love with all her heart and soul, if she ever loved at all. Probably she never would. There were not any men good enough for her. . . .

He seemed to know her infinitely better since that walk. Before that he had had a vision of her as a forlorn little child of seven, but what she had told him this afternoon gave him the material to follow her development up to the present day. He could see her as a girl of sixteen, having lessons with her governess, and being kept in comparative ignorance of the war; and again a year or two later, beginning to guess at the true significance of that great catastrophe. He had a new sense of having known her all her life. It was difficult to imagine life without her. Yet, if this affair turned out as he had every reason to expect it would, he might never see her again. . . .

A man was so impotent. If she did not care for him, that was the end of it. He could not make her care for him. The root of the whole trouble probably was that she despised him for staying on there in the first instance. She had classed him in her mind with all the others, a hanger-on, a weak fool who preferred to inherit money rather than to earn it! And, good God, she had been right! That was what he had been, a cursed parasite, living on a friendly host. Commensalism. Somers had guessed it too. Any one who had not been

pervverted by this infernal Hartling atmosphere could see it. And Eleanor, who had not been pervverted, the one exception in that place, had judged him without bias, had seen him as he was. Little wonder that she had despised him. His one hope now was to prove that she had in effect misjudged him. He must tell her that he had realised, however tardily, the kind of weak fool that he had been, and he would support his confession by action. He would not wait for a week, he would go the next day. He would see her for a minute after dinner, and just announce his determination, ask her to make sure of his appointment with the old man next morning. . . .

Before he went, he would make an opportunity to say good-bye to her. It was a heroic measure, but the only way by which he could hope to recover her esteem.

In his bath, and while he was dressing for dinner, he deliberately took his leave of luxury. He had lived the life of a millionaire for more than five weeks; might live it, if he chose, for perhaps another five years. But he was willing, eager, to renounce it all in order that he might recover Eleanor's esteem. He would make still greater sacrifices if he could win that reward.

And, oddly enough, there was another compensation which he had not consciously sought, but which he was instantly aware of as a result of his decision—he was a free man again. As he stood and looked at his reflection in the glass before going down to dinner, he was aware of that same feeling of release that had come to him when he had made his petition on behalf of Hubert, the day before. He lifted, *his* head with a touch of arrogance and squared his shoulders. Good God! what a damned

fool he had been ever to dally with the thought of staying on indefinitely at Hartling. He was an independent man now, in a kingdom of slaves. The Kenyons, after all, were to be pitied rather than condemned. What was the good of all this luxury if you were not the captain of your own soul? Ambition, work, and independence were the only things worth living for—if you could not have love.

But if it had not been for *her*. . . .

He was so full of his new resolve and so anxious to tell Eleanor, that he completely overlooked the unusually chastened air of the dinner-table that evening. He was trying to make an appointment with Eleanor by some almost invisible signal, and she persistently avoided his eloquent stare. Only twice did she meet his eyes, and on both occasions she turned away her head almost immediately. It seemed that he had lost all that he believed he had gained at the conclusion of their walk. Yet it was impossible that anything could have happened since, to change her new opinion of him. In any case, he would see her after dinner, even if he had to follow her upstairs. She would forgive him when she heard what he had to say.

He hardly noticed that Elizabeth—who was dressed in black that evening, a colour that did not suit her—was moody and depressed, or that Miss Kenyon seemed to have temporarily lost something of her autocratic, self-contained manner. And he was far too engrossed with his own affairs to attempt any inferences from the slight indications that he could not altogether overlook. He merely assumed that they were a little duller than usual—and pitied them.

He looked up once or twice at the head of the

table, turning over in his mind the various approaches by which he might most gently break his news the next morning, but the old man showed no sign of any unusual disturbance.

The moment Miss Kenyon gave her sister-in-law the signal to rise, Arthur jumped to his feet. He meant to allow no interference with his plans on this occasion. He was ready, if Miss Kenyon spoke to him, to pretend that he had not heard her. But no one intervened between him and Eleanor. They actually left the dining-room together.

She turned towards the staircase as they entered the hall, and afraid that she might run away, he began at once, "Could I speak to you for one minute? It's important. I . . ."

"Yes, I saw your signals at dinner," she interrupted him, none too graciously.

"Oh! did you? I'm sorry. I thought you didn't understand," he apologised. "You see, the fact is that I have decided to go, to leave here, to-morrow. I wanted to tell you, because I must see Mr Kenyon before I go."

They had reached the foot of the staircase now and she went up two stairs before she turned and looked at him, their eyes almost on a level. Her forehead was puckered into a little anxious frown. "Why have you changed your mind?" she asked.

He was warmed to a boldness that he had not dared hitherto. "I've been thinking over all our talk this afternoon," he said, "particularly yours, and I realised how absolutely right you were in despising me for hanging on here, and I felt that I could not stay another twenty-four hours."

She stretched out her arm and rested her fingers on the magnificent width of the mahogany hand-rail. "Why?" she asked.



"I could not bear the thought that you despised me," he said.

"I never did," she replied gently; "only I was sorry."

He was too drunk with the vapours of his own resolve to catch the finer significance of her answer. "It's frightfully kind of you to say that," he said, "but you've made me despise myself, and anyhow I'm going. So will you ask Mr Kenyon if he can see me to-morrow morning?"

She smiled faintly at the impetuosity of his boasting.

"I'm afraid he can't," she said. "He won't be here to-morrow."

"Not here?" he repeated in astonishment, and then as the implications of that unexpected news became clearer to him, he added, "Then it's possible that I might—that we could have another walk or something?"

She smiled more openly now. "It is, just possible," she said. "If you feel that you can, after all, put off your departure for another day."

"Oh, of course, in that case!" he said eagerly, and added, "Besides, I must see him before I go. How long will he be away?"

"He'll be back to-morrow afternoon," she told him. "He's only going up to town in the car for the day. Haven't you heard?"

"Heard? What? No, I don't believe I've spoken to any one hardly since we came in. Has anything happened?"

"One of the periodical rumblings of the earthquake," she said.

He was alive now to this new issue. "Can't you tell me?" he asked.

She glanced round the hall and up the stairs

before she said in a low voice, "He had a letter from Ken by the second post, a defiant letter, and rather rude. Ken's going to break away, he has borrowed the money to pay the worst of his debts, and leave enough over to pay his passage to South Africa. He knows some one who has a farm there and he's going to join him. Uncle Charles and Aunt Catherine are fearfully upset, of course, and it's one of those rare occasions when the foundations of the house begin to shake. I've only seen it happen before in the case of servants who have—well—broken away, but the effect is much the same, though the rumblings are deeper this time."

"Is he very annoyed?" Arthur asked. "He didn't seem upset at dinner."

"He? Oh, no! He's as calm as Fate," Eleanor said, "and as cruel."

"But why is he going up to town? Is he going to see Ken himself?"

She shook her head, glanced once more round the hall, and then bending towards him, whispered, "He's going to see his lawyer and alter the will. He hasn't said so, but every one knows."

Arthur pursed his mouth. "Pity I couldn't see him before he goes," he remarked. "Might save him another journey."

She looked at him with a frank approval, smiling her appreciation of his humour. "You're not afraid of him, are you?" she said.

He was afraid of nothing, as long as he could win her smiles, but he didn't brag. "There's no reason why I should be, is there?" he replied.

"Absolutely none," she said confidently. "But you may find him difficult, harder to deal with than you think. It was different with Ken. He didn't want to keep Ken. He does want to keep you. I

must go now. I've a heap of letters to do for him."

"But shall I see you to-morrow?" he said, as she turned and began to ascend the shallow stairs.

She did not answer that, but when she was half-way up the second flight she looked back at him and waved her hand.

He was more than content. That last glance of hers had again approved him. He had won a measure of admiration from her by his decision. And to-morrow, he would have her to himself—possibly for the whole day. . . .

He was still standing at the foot of the stairs, and after a moment's hesitation he went on up to his own room. He could not stand that crowd downstairs to-night. They would be depressingly gloomy, full of horrible forebodings about the impending alterations to that untidy will. He wanted to be alone with his own glorious thoughts.







## XI

ARTHUR hoped that he might meet Eleanor at the breakfast-table again the next morning, but although he put in an appearance before Miss Kenyon and Hubert had finished, and waited until after his aunt had come down, he saw nothing of Eleanor. He consoled himself with the reflection that she was probably busy with some preparation for her grandfather's visit to town.

He was awake now to the effect that the visit was having on the household. They were all uneasy, even Miss Kenyon, all as it seemed to him, unnecessarily nervous about their future. He inferred something of this attitude from the pre-occupation of the three members of the family he met at the breakfast-table; and later, his inference was fully confirmed.

They were momentarily shaken out of the belief into which they habitually lulled themselves, the belief that eventually they must all be decently provided for. The security of Hartling itself was threatened. Who knew what the old man might do in some fit of eccentricity? He might devise the estate to be used as a convalescent home or as a country house for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he chose. No one had the power to stop him or dispute his testament afterwards. For all legal purposes he was sane enough.

Joe Kenyon, Turner, and Hubert were all in the library at ten o'clock, but it was certainly not their

interest in the morning papers that kept them there. Yet, although they were manifestly unable to keep their attention on what they were reading, they appeared disinclined to talk.

Arthur was not less fidgety than the other three. He could not decide whether it would be better to wait for Eleanor after the old man had gone, or to go and find her. She might have a certain amount of work still to do that morning, and if so, might prefer to remain undisturbed until she had done it. On the other hand, she might expect him to come and fetch her.

"What time is Mr Kenyon going?" he asked at last, addressing his question vaguely to the company at large.

Neither Turner nor Hubert took any notice, but after a slight hesitation Joe Kenyon pulled out his watch, stared at it absent-mindedly, and then said, "Oh, I don't know! About half-past ten or eleven probably. He generally does."

Arthur put down his paper and walked over to the window. From there he could see the car already drawn up at the front door, but the attitude of Scurr, comfortably reclining in the driver's seat, seemed to imply that he was well accustomed to waiting. Waiting was an art in which one acquired proficiency at Hartling. Those who could not acquire it, like Ken Turner, had no place there. Eleanor was the single exception to all rules. She worked. . . . So did Miss Kenyon, for that matter. She ran the house amazingly well. But she waited, just as much as the others. She had been disturbed by the "rumblings of the earthquake"—was doubtful of her security. Eleanor did not care. She would be glad to go.

The front door opened soon after eleven o'clock,



and Arthur saw the head of the house come out with Eleanor in attendance.

"He's just going," Arthur announced to the other occupants of the library, and they dropped their papers at once and came over to the window.

The old man was just getting into the car. He needed no help. Eleanor stood by with a despatch case, which she gave to him after he was seated, but she did not offer to assist him in any other way. He was quite capable of looking after himself. He stepped into the car like a man of sixty. Then Scurr closed the door, and touched his cap, and in another minute they were slipping down the drive. None of the family had gone to the door to see him off. Not once, since he had been at Hartling, had Arthur seen any sign of filial affection displayed by the family. The old man patronised them with his gentle smile, but apparently he never looked for any return other than obedience and respect. He did not expect gratitude.

Joe Kenyon stretched himself in a prodigious yawn as the car vanished over the bridge. "Reminds me of the day poor old Jim went," he said.

Little Turner had begun to pace the width of the room under the windows. He had his hands on his hips, slowly smoothing them as he walked. He looked even neater and sleeker than usual this morning, but he was manifestly agitated. That odd, mechanical rubbing of his hands up and down his hips was the action of a man unconsciously seeking some relief.

"Well, it didn't so far as we know, make any difference to us, then," he commented, in reply to his brother-in-law's remark.

"So far as we know," Joe Kenyon repeated, awkwardly settling himself down in the window-seat.

"All U.P. with Ken, of course," Turner went on. "I hope to God he'll make some sort of a do of it in South Africa. He might—one never knows. I wish I could have done more to help him."

"Absolutely impossible to do anything," Joe Kenyon said, looking out of the window. "Fact was he didn't really want Ken. Got a strong streak of Jim in him. I've noticed it before. He'll do all right, I expect. Jim would have, in time. He had bad luck, that was all. Damned sorry for you and Catherine all the same."

"Wish to God I could go with him," Turner said. His brother-in-law thrust out his under-lip and shook his head. "Too soft for that kind of life," he murmured, still staring out of the window.

Turner chose to overlook that remark. "It's this cursed lack of ready money that beats you every time," he grumbled, as he paced up and down. "No getting round that anyway. We couldn't raise five hundred pounds between us to save our eternal souls."

Hubert, leaning against the end of the massive oak table that stood in the centre of the room, solemnly nodded his head. "Not three hundred," he said judicially.

Turner looked at him for an instant, but made no reply.

"Nothing whatever to be done," he went on. "We know that by this time. No need for him to show his fangs again to teach us that."

"Glad to have the opportunity all the same," Joe Kenyon put in.

Arthur, despite his immense preoccupation with the thought of Eleanor, could not help listening. They had never hitherto spoken as frankly as this before him. "Do you mean," he put in, "that he

is sort of intimidating you by going up to town?" He did not realise until he had spoken that by saying "you" instead of "us" he had implied the separateness of his own interest in the affair.

Turner stopped his walk and the nervous movement of his hands and stared at Arthur with a look that was not quite free from suspicion. "What else?" he jerked out, frowned impatiently, and then resumed his pacing, but this time with more deliberation.

Joe Kenyon, huddled into an ungainly heap in the window seat, was more honest or less discreet. "We're all in the same boat, my boy," he said, a remark that might have been addressed either to his brother-in-law or his nephew, and continued: "Of course it's done to intimidate us. We've seen that trick played too often to doubt it. Any excuse'll do. It hasn't been one of the family since Jim went, so this is a very special occasion; but even if it's only been one of the servants going to leave, he has never missed the chance of underlining the fact that he can alter his will whenever he feels like it."

Turner had come to rest in front of Arthur while this explanation was being made, and now prodded him gently in the chest with an elegant forefinger. "All the same, my lad," he said on a note of warning, "you'd better keep quiet about what you know or think you know. We've been a trifle upset this morning; it isn't altogether pleasant for a father to see his son turned adrift without a penny in his pocket, but getting excited won't make matters better for any of us."

"Well, as a matter of fact," Arthur began, and stopped abruptly. He had been on the verge of telling them that they need have no more doubts

about him, since this was almost certainly his last day at Hartling, but as he began to speak a doubt of his prudence in making that announcement overtook him. Once they knew he was going, they would again look upon him as an outsider and cease to have the least regard for him. Turner or Miss Kenyon—he trusted the others—might use him as a pawn in their own interests and anticipate him in conveying the news to old Kenyon—an eventuality that he wished to avoid, for despite all the evidence that was being presented to him, he still believed that they did the old man less than justice, and it was his disappointment rather than his anger that Arthur feared at the coming interview.

"As a matter of fact?" Turner repeated, with raised eyebrows, after a decent pause.

"Well, I've no personal interest to serve, have I?" Arthur said. "I made it quite clear to you, I hope, that I have no—no expectations, and shouldn't accept any legacy if it were left to me."

"You wouldn't accept *anything*, not even a thousand pounds, for instance?" Turner asked.

"Not a red cent," Arthur returned with decision. He could say that now, he reflected, with perfect safety.

"Then why stay?" Turner said.

Arthur blushed vividly, the blush of a naturally honest man caught in an equivocation, but Turner misread its origin.

"No need to be embarrassed," he went on. "We guessed it would be like that, and the old man seems favourable. But doesn't it strike you as probable that if the affair comes off you may change your mind about those possible expectations? I'm not talking without something to go on, my boy. I've been through precisely the same experience

myself." He sighed and looked out of the window as he concluded. "And a damned dirty mess I've made of it."

Arthur's blush had been restimulated by Turner's misconception as to its cause, and still burnt his face as he replied, "There's no earthly chance of that, if you mean . . . what I presume you do. And in any case, I'm not *going* to stay. I've made up my mind about that. I shall be leaving here, for good, fairly soon."

Joe Kenyon looked up hopefully. "Wise man," he commented, and Hubert nodded a melancholy agreement.

"Fairly soon?" Turner rolled the words over with a rather impish enjoyment. "Ah, well! we can re-discuss the precise intention of 'fairly soon' in a month's time."

Ever since Mr Kenyon had gone Arthur had been fretting intermittently over the problem of whether he should take the initiative or leave it to Eleanor, and this indirect talk of her was increasing his impatience. It was nearly a quarter to twelve now, and the morning was slipping away. He had hoped that she might either come to look for him or send him a message but every minute that possibility grew less probable. Yet he did not care to leave the library at this point in the conversation. It would look as if he were trying to shirk the issue.

"I certainly shan't be here a month," he said, addressing little Turner; "almost certainly not another week."

"Does the old man know that?" Turner asked.

"Not yet," Arthur said. "But I'm going to tell him at once. To-morrow morning at latest."

Turner was reflectively twisting the ends of his neat moustache.

"Oh, well! my boy," he remarked, "we'll wait to settle that point of *when* you'll go until after you've seen him. He may have a card or two to play that you haven't guessed at so far. Eh, Joe?"

Joe Kenyon pursed his mouth. His expression was not hopeful.

"I've quite made up my mind," Arthur said, with what he hoped was an effect of complete finality. He had settled his problem now. He would go and find Eleanor. All the day, his last day, might be lost if he waited for her. She might be angry with him, but he would risk that. He could not endure this suspense any longer. He could hear the hall clock striking twelve.

Little Turner with a knowing, half-whimsical look of doubt on his face, still stood in front of him.

"Well, it's no good arguing that, is it?" Arthur continued irritably. "You'll know for certain to-morrow."

Turner turned away with a shrug of his neat shoulders. "Wonderful house for to-morrows, this," he said. "Always has been."

Arthur, inspired to pretend that he considered himself insulted, walked out of the room. By that little piece of chicane he escaped from all his dilemmas at a stroke. He had been horribly afraid that if he attempted some excuse to get away, Hubert might offer to accompany him. The suggestion of golf had hung in the air as a way of passing the afternoon, and some sort of untruthful evasion would have been necessary to avoid it.

He went first to the drawing-room on the off-chance that Eleanor might have come as far as that in search of him, but no one was there except his aunt and Mrs Turner; the latter, sitting with her

hands in her lap staring fixedly out of the window. She had obviously been crying. His aunt did not look up from her fancy-work as he passed through with an air of having accidentally intruded upon a private ceremony. Poor old Mrs Turner; it had not occurred to him that she would be so upset by her son's departure for South Africa. He was, as a matter of fact, lucky to have broken away; but to the Kenyons, no doubt, the evils of the outer world appeared altogether monstrous compared with the securities of Hartling.

He had no hesitation now as to where he should seek Eleanor. Unless she had gone out without him—a ghastly alternative that he refused to believe—she must be upstairs somewhere in old Mr Kenyon's private suite. But when he knocked at the door of the little room whose chief use appeared to be that of a lobby, no one answered. He had never before entered the suite unannounced, and he opened the door and went in with a faint sense of trepidation. The room was empty and the door to the next room closed, but this time he entered without knocking.

He was now in the apartment in which he had always been received when he paid his morning visit, and farther than this he had never penetrated. Obviously, however, there were other rooms beyond. He remembered that he had seen Eleanor go through that way sometimes when he had been engaged with the old man, and as he stood hesitating he thought he heard very remotely the clicking of a typewriter. He went over to the farther door and knocked, and was answered faintly from within. He discovered then that there were double doors, four feet apart, between him and the

## 226 *THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING*

next room. When he had opened the second he found himself in what appeared to be a perfectly appointed office.

The walls were nearly hidden by white-lettered deed-boxes, pedestals of standard letter-files, a tremendous nest of card-index drawers, and a book-case containing four or five hundreds works of reference: law-books, encyclopædias, directories, gazetteers, registers and official reports. Flush with the face of the wall that divided this office from the room through which he had just passed was the door of what was, no doubt, an enormous safe. The centre of the room was occupied by an extensive solid oak table, at which, seated with her back to him, Eleanor was engaged with a typewriter.

She did not turn round as he came in, and said, without stopping her work or looking up, "Shut both doors behind you, and sit down over there. I shan't be very long."

So she was expecting him, was his thought as he followed her instructions, and she was not presumably altogether displeased with him for coming. He sat down on the seat of one of those oriel windows that were the most pleasing feature of Hartling's south elevation. He did not, however, turn his attention to the panorama of the gardens that stretched out below him, nor to the glimpses of the rolling Sussex country visible as an effect of blue mysterious freedoms beyond the wardenship of that stiff, enclosing wall. He had no eyes, no thought for anything but Eleanor.

From here, he could watch her earnest, intent profile, bent a little forward over the typewriter. She looked, he thought a trifle flushed, and something in her intense concentration on her work



gave her the air of being faintly embarrassed, an air that was not less marked when she whirled the letter off the roller and having glanced at it said in a formal voice, "This is our office, the heart of the house. Don't you think it looks very orderly and business-like?"

He agreed without enthusiasm. His mind was still obsessed with the idea that they were again going out together to the hill that had the view of the South Downs. He felt no inclination just then to discuss the business affairs of old Kenyon.

"This is the mainspring of the whole machine," Eleanor went on, looking at the range of deed boxes in front of her; "and I don't think there is the least fear of the machine breaking down. We are very methodical and very safe. We never gamble. We don't pretend to be far-sighted or ingenious, we're just plodders, adding a few thousands to our capital every year. Do you know that there are securities in this room worth well over half a million? I can't give you exact figures because there are one or two secrets into which the private secretary is not admitted. But I do know that even after we've paid the enormous sums demanded from us in taxes, our income considerably exceeds our disbursements." She looked round at him as she added, "Aren't you dazzled? Don't you feel exalted by being in the presence of all this wealth?"

He was puzzled, uncertain of her mood. Her speech had had a strong flavour of irony, but there was no trace of it in her manner. "Oh! confound the beastly money," he said, "I came up to see if we were going for another walk."

"Not to-day," she said. "I have far too much to do. Perhaps this letter I've just written will explain why."

She held it out towards him, and he jumped up and took it from her and then read it, leaning against the edge of the table.

It was addressed to Mrs Payne, and after a few opening phrases, continued: "I want to come and stay with you for a week or two if you could possibly manage to have me. I can't tell you why till I see you, but I should like to come on Friday, the day after to-morrow. I know it is dreadfully short notice. . . ."

He broke off there and looked at her in bewilderment. His mind had leapt back to their talk on the hill. Was she doing this, he wondered, in order that he might stay on?

"But I don't in the least understand why you have written this," he said frowning. "Why are you going? Do you mean that you're leaving here for good?"

She nodded gravely.

"But why?" he persisted. "I thought that we agreed . . ."

"Don't you want me to go?" she asked.

"No. I don't," he said emphatically.

"Would you stay on if I went?" she returned.

"No, I wouldn't. Nothing on earth should induce me to," he declared vehemently, still regarding her departure as an alternative to his own.

"Then what's your objection?" she said.

His eyes were suddenly opened then to a new prospect. He would not lose sight of her if they both left Hartling. He hated the thought of her working in a London office, but she would be within his reach there. He could, in a sense, look after her. They could meet quite often—if she were willing.

"You mean," he said, "that we might both go?"

"I know of no reason why your going should affect me one way or the other." Her tone was cold, even a trifle disdainful.

He was slightly taken aback. "No, no, of course not. It has nothing to do with me," he agreed. "But what has made you change your mind? Or don't you want to tell me that?"

She got up from her chair and walked over to the window. "There's one thing I want you to tell me first," she said. "Will my going have the least effect on your own plans?"

He considered that for a moment before he replied with perfect sincerity. "Absolutely none. Whatever happens, I'm going back to Somers to-morrow afternoon."

She had turned her back on him and was looking out over the prospect that had so recently failed to interest him.

"It isn't altogether that," she said over her shoulder, making a gesture with her hand that may have indicated the distant weald of Sussex. "I shouldn't go if it were only that I wanted to be free and independent."

She paused so long after this statement that he was emboldened to prompt her by saying, "You seem to have made up your mind so suddenly."

"The truth is that I can't stand it any longer," she said in a low voice. "I simply can't stand it."

He waited patiently this time for her to continue. He saw that she had something to say which she found difficult to put into words. The pose of her upright figure suggested a certain tensivity of motion and when after another silent interval she turned and faced him, her hands were clenched.

"And I'm haunted by the fear that I may be wrong after all," she said, looking at him as if for

## 230 THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

help. "And you are the last person in the world, I suppose, who can tell me whether I am wrong or not."

"I don't quite understand yet. Is it about him—Mr Kenyon?" he asked.

She did not deign to answer his question directly. "You're supposed to know something about psychology, aren't you?" she went on. "Well, is it possible for a man to lose all decent, human feeling even for his own family?"

"Lord, yes," Arthur replied. "Speaking generally, of course, misers, for instance. Some of them seem to lose all human feeling."

"He isn't the least a miser," she put in. "He's often extraordinarily generous outside his own family."

"I only instanced that as a well-known type," he said. "But drink or drugs will do the same thing."

"Yes, but in all those cases there is always a definite *vice* of some sort," she complained. "Something that you can take hold of, understand more or less, as a cause for it all. But he hasn't any vices, unless you can call it a vice to be deliberately cruel to your own children and grandchildren without any apparent reason."

"But is he actually cruel?" Arthur remonstrated. "Doesn't he perhaps really mean it all for their own good. He may be deluded—he almost said as much to me—into thinking that they are weaker and less capable than they actually are; but that would be a natural delusion enough in a man of his age."

Eleanor threw out her hands with a gesture of confutation. "And you!" she exclaimed. "Does he believe that you aren't capable of looking after your own interests too?"

"Why me?" Arthur objected.

"Because he has been trying to *get* you. Oh! manifestly trying to—to add you to his collection," she exclaimed passionately. "It was that that opened my eyes. Until you came, I had hardly a doubt of *him*. I didn't like the life we lead here. It bored me. I believe I've always hated money—it must have been born in me, if that's possible. But I believed more or less what you do now, that he—looked after them, that his only fault, if anything, was that he looked after them too much.

"And then there was the suggestion of your coming here for a week-end visit. That was something rather exceptional. We'd had old Mr Beddington not long before—it was he who told my grandfather about you—and I remember wondering whether he was beginning to pine for more company or something. And I—I was rather interested in what I heard of you; we talked a little about you once or twice, and one day, after you had accepted the invitation, he threw out a kind of hint that he'd like to keep you here. That bothered me somehow. I'd made some sort of picture of you in my mind, and I—it's difficult to explain exactly—but I didn't like the idea of your—getting like the others. Some silly, romantic school-girl notion or other. I don't know quite why."

She paused and turned back to the window. Her colour had risen again, and Arthur believed that she was embarrassed by her thought of him as the hero of her old dream. How bitterly disappointed she must have been when she had found that her imagined hero had been a mere idler, like the others, willing to slack about and play games, in the hope of a place in the old man's will! Good God, what a poor thing she must have thought him! He

looked down and began aimlessly to smooth the carpet with his foot. He felt utterly humiliated and miserable. Without a word of reproach she had exposed the weakness and unworthiness of him; and he could only acknowledge that she was right.

He did not look up at once when she turned back to him and went on. "It was the first time that I had seen the thing happening, if you know what I mean. I could follow all the stages of it. I saw how he let you enjoy the easiness of the life here before he made any sort of offer, and then just dangled it in front of you and tried to make it look as if you would be doing him a favour. Well, that was true enough in a way—you were. But the horrible thing, to me, was that he never paid you any salary. That really opened my eyes more than anything. He believed that you had given up your work at Peckham; that what would mostly likely tempt you away from here was the idea of going to Canada, and he wanted to make that impossible. I know that was it. I'm perfectly certain of it. And on the top of it there came that affair about Hubert's engagement and this fuss over Ken. That finished it for me. Ken isn't really bad. Most young men in his place would have got into debt, and I don't believe that he was the least angry about that. Of course the money to put the debts straight was nothing at all to him. He wouldn't have thought twice about that, but he has just turned Ken out without the least thought for poor Aunt Catherine, who is simply heartbroken about it. I believe Uncle Charles is really more upset, too, than he cares to admit."

"I know. I was talking to him this morning," Arthur put in.

"Well, will you tell me why he does these things

if he is not an inhuman, heartless brute?" Eleanor concluded.

Arthur could find no answer to that.

"But you still believe in him?" she asked.

"It's so—so incredible," he said.

"Oh! and this morning!" Eleanor broke out, with a passion of resentment in her voice. "All this petty, silly, detestable business of his going up to town to alter his will. Why? I don't believe for a moment that he ever left Ken anything. He never liked him. Ken was too independent to please him. No; I believe that he has gone to see Mr Fleet to-day, just to make them feel his power over them. He was glad of the opportunity. . . ."

"That's exactly what they were saying downstairs just now," Arthur admitted. "That he was glad of the opportunity to shake them up a bit. But I suppose I'm prejudiced; I'm so new to it all; only it doesn't seem to me, somehow, as if he were that kind of a man."

"He has been nice to you, of course," Eleanor commented. "He would be, just yet. And you've only seen one side of him. But doesn't it strike you that this is a queer household? I don't remember any other; but I've read novels, and if they're anything like life, it must be very unusual for a man to live with his family and never receive any sign of affection from them. Doesn't it seem to you as if he were their master rather than their father?"

"Yes. I was thinking something of the kind this morning," Arthur agreed. "But I wondered if there weren't faults on both sides in a way."

Eleanor looked at him doubtfully. "I don't know; it's beyond me," she said. "But now you know why I'm going, don't you? It isn't as if I could help any of them by staying. No one has

the least influence with him, not the very least. It may have looked as if you had helped Hubert about that engagement. You did in one way, but it was all because he was trying to get a tighter hold of you. Oh, well!" she sighed, and half turned away from him, before adding unexpectedly, "I'm glad you're going."

"You despised me for wanting to stay, didn't you?" he said.

"I was sorry," she admitted.

"More than that, you despised me," he insisted. "You were right, too, absolutely right. I really only saw it properly when you said just now that you were interested in me, in a way, before I came. And then, of course, you were bitterly disappointed. I can see all that now."

She was looking out of the window again, and the fact that he could not see her face gave him courage. He came a little nearer to her, as he went on, "I haven't any excuse to offer. None at all. I was a silly, weak fool, and I should have gone on being a fool if it hadn't been for you. But now I *have* come to my senses, and I'm going back to work, and it would help me frightfully if—when I'm in Peckham—if you're ever up in town—if I could see you now and again. You've only seen me here and I've been a different person since I've been here. Would it be possible for me to see you ever, after you go to stay with those people?"

She was kneeling up on the window seat now, leaning her forehead against the glass, and she did not move her position as she said, in the tone of one who quietly weighs a proposition, "Oh, yes. Why not?"

"It would help me tremendously," he submitted.

She was silent for a few seconds before she



suddenly said in a light conversational tone, "It was all bosh, of course, what you said just now."

"What was?" he asked in surprise.

"All that about your being a weak fool and my despising you for it," she said, still with her forehead pressed against the glass of the window.

"Do you mean that you didn't despise me?" he asked eagerly, and then as an afterthought, "But in that case why were you so fearfully down on me?"

"I didn't want you to waste your life here," she murmured, "I know it wasn't any business of mine, but I simply couldn't stand the thought of your becoming one of—them."

He could not mistake the implication of those last two sentences. She had confessed to an interest in his welfare that deeply stirred and aroused him. Something of his humility began to fall from him, his recent passion of self-condemnation assuaged by her belief in the promise of his life. And with that reaction all those phases of his admiration which had for so long been secretly merging into love, were suddenly tinged by an ecstasy of gratitude. She appeared infinitely more to him at the moment than either friend or possible lover. She was the supreme miracle of creation embodied in that graceful form, outlined against the window. The benefactor, the giver, the maker of himself. By her simple expression of belief in him, she had given him a soul. He wanted to kneel before her in adoration. . . .

Intrigued and a little embarrassed by his prolonged silence, she slipped off the window seat and turned to him with the beginning of a conversational commonplace that was checked by the adoring intensity of his gaze.

"It must be nearly . . ." she had begun, and then stopped and put her hands to her face to hide the flood of colour that leapt to her cheeks.

And still he could not speak. All the love and poetry that surged within him could find no expression in his modern phrase. At the mere thought of any gesture, movement, or word, he was frozen by his self-consciousness; all too aware of himself as a product of his own time, of the little conventional self that he had always presented as a representative of the authentic Arthur Woodroffe.

And yet he knew that this was his moment, that if he let it slip he might never again find an opportunity to say what he knew, now, was within him, and so he grasped at an opening, however conventional, in order to anticipate some slipping back into the everyday manner, on her part or his own, that might release the fatuities of the manikin.

"There is something I must say to you," he broke out. "Please don't interrupt me. It's—oh! necessary. I . . ." He found that he could not lose himself, standing there in stark inaction with her before him, and began to pace up and down the room, keeping his eyes on the ground.

"To begin with, I must thank you," he went on, trying not to think of himself in any future relation to her. "I want to go on thanking you. I can't possibly tell you what you've done for me. Everything, all life, is different now that I've got just the hope that you believe in me. It has given me a hope of—myself. If you can believe in me, nothing can ever be the same again. Oh! I wish I could tell you all that it has done for me, just knowing you. But I can't. I can't say it, but I can live it, and you know that I will. I'm sure you know that. I can feel it. If . . ."

He paused and looked up. She was sitting in the window-seat, her head bent and her hands in her lap. And with that he forgot his self-consciousness, plunged across the room, and went down on his knees before her.

"Eleanor," he said. "Do you know how I worship you?"

She did not answer him in words, but it seemed as if by a series of infinitely delicate movements they came slowly together, until her hands, with his own clasping them, were on his breast and they were looking into each other's eyes. There was no need then for them to say that they had loved from their first meeting, but now that the pressure of that first overpowering urgency had weakened, words came more easily.

It was not, however, until some time later that he found one essential explanation.

"But the first time that I really *knew* how much I loved you," he said, "was when I saw you in imagination, as a solemn little chit of seven standing by the elephant's pad in the hall. You seemed so precious then."







## XII

THEY had their afternoon together—free from embarrassment, for they constrained themselves to conceal their happiness during the ordeal of lunch in order that they might enjoy for an hour or two the sacred reserves of their precious secret. After that, as they well understood, the family would have to know, and more than the fact of their engagement. They would have to be told, also, that Hartling was to lose two of its members.

They debated that last decision before they were agreed. Arthur, still suspicious of the good faith of Miss Kenyon and Charles Turner, was for postponing what he regarded as the lesser announcement until after his interview with the old man. Eleanor saw more clearly.

"They would never dare to anticipate us," she said. "It would be too risky. Haven't you realised that they never interfere with him? For one thing they are agreed that there shan't be any kind of competition between them, for favours and so on—which is awfully wise of them, if you come to think of it. And for another, they would not like to be the bearer of bad news or even disturbing news. Their fear of him goes as deep as that."

"And yet he never loses his temper with them, does he? Or threatens them in any way?" Arthur asked.

"He threatens them all the time, indirectly," she said. "But I've never seen him lose his temper. He doesn't seem to care enough for that."

They had found a delightfully secluded spot in the larch plantation for their talk, and it was from there that they saw the car return a little before five o'clock. By that time, however, their plans were settled. The fact of their engagement was to be whispered to some member of the family when they went in to tea, in the certain hope that thereafter the news would instantly spread through the household. The second, and, for the Kenyons, the more important announcement was to follow, with the warning that the head of the house was to be told nothing until the next morning, when it should be Arthur's duty to inform him.

And so far as the future was concerned they were content to await the day. If the expected explosion took place, Eleanor was to go to the Paynes; she had sent her letter and seemed to have no doubt that they would receive her. Arthur was prepared in any case to return to Peckham the next afternoon.

They rose reluctantly when they saw the car softly running up the drive. No caresses had been exchanged between them as yet, but they had been exquisitely content in each other's company. Arthur asked for nothing better than to sit at her feet, and enjoy the bliss of her favour. And they had so much to say that had so far been impeded by the necessity for making their immediate plans. They wanted to tell one another the stories of their lives. He knew more of her life than she knew of his, Eleanor complained, and made it clear that every detail of his youth and young manhood must be told to her.

Moreover, for those two hours they had been temporarily emancipated from every restraint of Hartling, and now they had to face the task of finally cutting themselves free. And Eleanor knew



that that task would not be performed without effort. Her grandfather would exert himself to the utmost to keep them both, and she had an uneasy fear that he might discover some form of suasion which might appear morally to bind them. She had never yet seen him exert himself in any connection of this kind. Until now he had always been so easily and so disinterestedly master of the situation. She had been present when he had dismissed Ken Turner's request for the payment of his debts, and had seen her grandfather refuse that petition with the emotional indifference of a man who decided between his investments. He had not shown a spark of temper, and his refusal, however final, had been almost gentle. She hoped that he would display the same methods on this occasion. But she was afraid that he might draw upon some hitherto untouched reserve of power. He had so much the air of a man with immense hidden reserves.

Also, she expected a chorus of remonstrance and dissuasion from the rest of the family. She knew that they all, with the exception of Miss Kenyon, were genuinely fond of her—it was impossible to picture Miss Kenyon as being *fond* of any one—and she guessed that their pleading might be hard to resist. Indeed, if anything could have altered her decision, it would have been her sense of compassion for them. If she could have helped them, she might have stayed. But she knew that her departure would make no real difference to their lives. Only one event could do that.

The announcement of the engagement created only a mild stir in the Hartling drawing-room. Evidently the thing had been expected; no opposition was anticipated in this instance from the ruler

of destinies, and the affair was amply justified by precedent. Mrs Turner was still very depressed, and the news seemed to add another melancholy to her very depressed thoughts. No doubt she was reflecting that if her son had fallen in love with his Cousin Elizabeth, he too might now be settling down with the others to await the inevitable event that must finally determine their period of bondage. And if he had done that, the family would have been complete, with no further fear of any intrusion from the outside.

Hubert gave the fullest expression to his congratulations. He appeared genuinely pleased, and went as far as suggesting that his own marriage and Arthur's might take place on the same day. And Elizabeth was at least outwardly complacent; although Arthur wondered if her almost incessant chatter, that afternoon, concealed a faint chagrin. Probably she would have married him if he had asked her. Not because she was in love with him, but because he happened to be the only man available.

Joe Kenyon alone exhibited any signs of uneasiness, glancing across at Arthur more than once over the tea-table with a look that conveyed a hint of doubt and suspicion.

Arthur himself was far from confident. He was unhappily aware of the fact that he was accepting their congratulations under false pretences. And he could not bring himself to announce his further plans to the full company. If Eleanor had been present they might have dared it together. But she had gone straight up to her grandfather after confiding the news of the engagement to Mrs Kenyon, and had not come down again.

It was inevitably his uncle that Arthur chose as

his first confidant. There was a certain honesty and heartiness about him that the others lacked, and from him alone, perhaps, could be expected disinterested encouragement and advice. Moreover, Arthur was a trifle curious about that look of suspicion he had caught on his uncle's face.

"Care to come for a stroll down the garden," he asked, going up to him before the meal was actually finished.

"Eh? Oh! Wait till I get a cigar on," Joe Kenyon replied. "I'd like to have a talk with you."

As usual all essentials were deferred until they were out of earshot of the house, and then Joe Kenyon began somewhat abruptly by saying,—

"Changed your mind, I suppose, about what you said to Charles this morning. You won't be leaving us now, I take it."

"I shall," Arthur said. "She's coming too."

Joe Kenyon stopped in his walk and stared his surprise. "Good God!" he ejaculated on a note of alarm. "Surely you don't mean it?"

"I do," Arthur affirmed. "That was what I wanted to talk to you about. We settled it all between us this afternoon. It is quite possible that we may both go to-morrow."

Joe Kenyon again sought refuge in his "Good God!" He appeared to be completely staggered for the moment, looked back at the house, down towards the iron gates, then threw back his head and gently blew a thin wreath of cigar smoke into the air. "What you going to live on?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm going into partnership with the man I was working with before I came here," Arthur said. "We shall have about five hundred a year, I expect, to begin with."

"Is it possible to live on that, in these days?" his uncle asked.

"Oh, yes! rather. It isn't much, of course," Arthur said.

"Both of you?"

"For a time. I hope to make more—in a year or two."

"Then why doesn't Eleanor wait until you've felt your feet a bit?"

"She won't. She wants to get away quite as much as I do—more, I think."

"But where's she going to—to-morrow? If she goes to-morrow?"

"To the Paynes. The people who brought her over from South America."

"Seem to have worked it all out," Joe Kenyon commented, with a deep sigh. "How long have you been making these plans?"

"Only this afternoon," Arthur said. "But she had written to the Paynes before we—before I said anything to her, you know. She meant to go in any case."

"The old man doesn't know yet, of course," his uncle continued.

"Going to tell him to-morrow morning."

Joe Kenyon considered that thoughtfully for a few seconds before he said, "Can't do anything to *you*, of course. You may have a pretty stiff time, both of you, but damn it, you're free. He's got no hold on *you*. Can't *do* anything—except chuck you out, which is all you're asking for."

"Quite," Arthur agreed, and then added: "This won't affect you in any way, will it, uncle?"

Joe Kenyon pursed his mouth. "Can't put it down to us. Can he?" he inquired. "You'll make that plain enough, between you. What I mean is,

this'll be a knock for him, worst in twenty-five years, and he may be spiteful, work off his annoyance on one of us after you've gone, if there's the least excuse."

"Oh! there can't be the least question of involving any one but our two selves," Arthur assured him.

"Damn it, I wish it hadn't been Eleanor," his uncle grumbled, adding inconsequently, "Pretty stiff coming the day after the other affair. If anything'll upset him this will. He'll put up a devil of a fight for Eleanor. She's damned useful to him. But, Good Lord! what can he *do*, when it comes to the point? If you're determined to go, there's the end of it. He can't *make* you stay." He looked apologetically at Arthur as he continued: "It's different for you. You've got a profession, prospects. None of *us* have. And then we'd been brought up to it. So has Hubert. . . . All the same, we'd thought you'd stay. We shouldn't have blamed you either if you had. Very glad in a way. Oh, well! Good Lord; I don't know. Honestly, Arthur, how long do you think it's *possible* he might hang on?"

Arthur shook his head. "You can't tell," he admitted. "He's as sound as a bell physically, and he has got the will to live. And so long as a man has that, you know, and there's nothing organically wrong . . ."

"Might easily live another ten years?" Joe Kenyon said.

"Quite easily," Arthur replied.

He realised later in the evening that in his conversation his uncle had summarised the family opinion. Their attitude towards himself was

marked by that same discretion which had characterised it immediately before his championship of Hubert. They were afraid of the least appearance of complicity; and avoided too direct a reference to the subject that must have been uppermost in their thoughts. Turner's casual, "Hear you're going to take up your work again. Pretty dull for you down here, I suppose, without any settled employment," was a mere acknowledgment of the fact, and manifestly deprecated any further elaboration of the topic. And Hubert contented himself with spasms of melancholy gazing, as if he were trying to intimate as tactfully and safely as possible his personal sorrow and regret. Miss Kenyon was more nearly affable than Arthur had ever known her to be, and talked to him at dinner about his profession with every sign of interest.

The meal had an unprecedented air of informality that night owing to the absence of the head of the house, who dined in his own room. Eleanor, also, was absent from the table—to Arthur's great disappointment. He hoped to have another talk with her before his interview with the old man, and had fully expected to see her in the dining-room and be able to make some appointment with her afterwards.

About half-past nine, however, this particular anxiety was relieved, if none too satisfactorily, by a note that was brought down to him by one of the maids. "No hope this evening," Eleanor had written, "but I will see you upstairs before you go in to him to-morrow. Come up at half-past ten. I have told him about our engagement and he seemed to be pleased—chiefly, I think, because he believes it will give him a greater hold over you. It's rather awful, somehow. I'm not a bit happy

about your seeing him. I'm afraid of something, though I don't in the least know what. Sleep well."

Arthur cherished that little letter for its first sentence. "No hope this evening" thrilled him by its sweet familiarity and its quiet acceptance of the fact that they wanted to be together. It said so much more than any stereotyped term of endearment. Her final note of foreboding did not disturb him. He had no fear for the future, since the only future he saw was life with Eleanor. He had begun to plan the possibility of a small flat somewhere, if one could be found. There was no reason why they should not be married quite soon.

He looked up to find the eye of little Turner fixed upon him with a half-whimsical smile.

"What about a last game?" he asked, making a daring reference to the forbidden topic.

"Rather," Arthur agreed cheerfully.

"I'll come and mark," Hubert volunteered in much the tone he might have used if he had been offering his services as chief mourner.

Arthur found no difficulty in following Eleanor's advice to sleep well. He lay awake for half an hour or so thinking of her, but after that he slept soundly and his sleep was undisturbed. He did not even remember his dreams when he woke. And he had no sinking of the heart, no sick qualms of anticipation the following morning. His waking thoughts were all of Eleanor, the incident of the necessary interview with old Kenyon appeared to him as no more than one of the many necessary steps that he must take before he could enter the Paradise of his life with her. He was, for the time being, obsessed with a single idea, and his one annoyance was the

fact that two and a half hours must elapse before he would see her again.

His uncle misread his evident abstraction when they met in the library after breakfast.

"Worried, Arthur?" he asked in a confidential voice behind the shield of the *Times*, although there was no one in the room just then but himself and his nephew.

"Worried? Lord, no," Arthur replied frankly. "Quite the contrary."

"All right for you, my boy, but you'll have a rare trouble to make him give up Eleanor," his uncle said.

"He can't keep her if she wants to go," Arthur returned, but Joe Kenyon refused to commit himself any further.

"Oh, well! Wait and see," he said.

Arthur's peace of mind was in no way disturbed by that hint of the possible difficulties ahead of him. His uncle's warning seemed to him nothing more than a symptom of the characteristic Kenyon weakness. They were timid, apprehensive creatures, sapped and enfeebled by their life of comfort and seclusion.

He was, however, suddenly startled into doubt by Eleanor's reception of him in the little ante-room. He had expected to find her as confident and self-reliant as he was himself. He had hoped that their half-hour's talk would be all of their own delightful future. He found her anxious, trembling, on the verge of tears.

"Sit down," she said, when Arthur came in. "I want to talk to you first. It's quite safe. He's in the office, and in any case you can't hear what's said from the next room."

But after he had obeyed her, she could not come



at once to what she had to say. She turned her back on him and began to arrange some papers on a side table, standing, he thought, less erectly than she usually stood. And when she faced him, there was in her expression the reluctance of one who has to admit defeat.

"Do you think, after all, that we had better go?" she asked.

He was too astonished to reply directly. He got up and took a step towards her. "Why? What's the matter?" he said.

She backed away from him and held up her hands, as if to defend herself.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't go—alone," she said.

"Go alone?" he repeated in a voice of such dismay that any repetition of that suggestion would have been ridiculous.

"Very well," she continued, soothing him with a faint smile. "If that's quite out of the question, is it possible that we might both stay?"

"Indefinitely?"

"Or for a time."

"Like the rest of them? Isn't that how they all began?" he asked.

She sighed and clasped her hands together. "Oh, Arthur, I'm afraid," she confessed. "I don't know *what* I'm afraid of. It isn't of him or of anything he can do to us. I've been arguing with myself, but it's no good. It just comes down to the one fact that I'm afraid."

Almost instinctively Arthur put out his hand and laid a finger on her pulse. "Since when have you been afraid?" he asked her.

"Ever since he came in yesterday," she told him. "He was just as usual, not overtired as far as I

could see, or put out, or anything. But directly I began to talk to him this queer feeling of fear came over me. It was . . . Arthur, it was just as if I knew something terrible was going to happen." She slipped her pulse from his fingers, thrust her hand into his, and clung to it tightly as she continued, "And I've been thinking that perhaps I may have been wrong about him. I don't believe I slept an hour last night. I kept going over it all again and again until I nearly persuaded myself that he had always meant well—underneath. And if he has, and I desert him now, and the shock of it made him ill—it might, mightn't it?—I should feel so awful about it. Oh! what do you think we ought to do? You know we might be—be married—here—and go on much as we have been—with that difference."

For a moment Arthur was tempted, realising in his own feelings something of what the other dwellers in the house must have gone through before they descended to their present level of fatalistic acceptance. And if he had not been so deeply in love with Eleanor he would almost certainly have yielded as the others had done before him. He was saved by the memory of his own abasement the previous morning. He had known then that he could never be worthy of her so long as he was too inert to face the struggle of life.

He put his arm round her and drew her close to him—the first caress he had dared. "No," he said. "Quite definitely no! I should hate myself if we did that. You have cured me of the least wish to slack my life away. I shouldn't be good enough for you, if I did. I don't mean to say that I'm good enough in any case, but I shall try to be. . . ." He paused, and with the lingering fond-

ness of one who murmurs the tenderest of all endearments, added softly, "Eleanor."

Her only answer was to press a little nearer to him, and he felt that she was now leaning upon his strength; she who had given him that strength in the first instance.

"It was you who made me see everything so clearly, yesterday," he went on. "I saw myself as I was, a detestable parasite. I could have hated myself for daring to love you. And whatever happens, I could not face that feeling again. It has gone absolutely. I don't believe I should ever have had it if it hadn't been for the influences and temptations of this place. It undermines one's will—though it has never undermined yours."

She hid her face. "It has, it has," she whispered. "I didn't know it until last night. I thought I was strong."

He was seized with a momentary panic. "You mean that you're afraid to face life with me on five hundred a year?" he asked.

She lifted her head and smiled at him. "I'd face life with you on a hundred a year, cheerfully," she said. "It isn't that."

He was infinitely relieved by that assurance, for he had had a glimpse of a condition that might still defeat him. If she had been afraid of the life he had had to offer her, he might have been forced to compromise. "What is it, then?" he asked tenderly.

"My grandfather," she said. "He—he paralyses my will, I think. I can feel his power over me here, this very minute. I'm afraid of him now that I'm going to oppose him, just as they are all afraid of him. It's like the fear one has in a dream, the fear of something with an unearthly power that you

can't escape from—something—something evil. I—do you know I meant to tell him last night, that I—that we were going? And I couldn't. He was sitting there perfectly quiet and good-tempered—we were having dinner together—and I thought, why shouldn't I break it to him—at once—about us? But as soon as that idea came into my mind I began to tremble. It was like—oh! like having to plunge your hand down into some horrible dark hole, not knowing what ghastly unclean thing you might find there. And I couldn't do it. *I couldn't, I couldn't.*"

Her voice had risen to a slightly hysterical note as she concluded, and he held her to him and gently fondled and soothed her as he said reassuringly, "It's only because he has been your employer and master all these years. And in any case he has no power over me. I have never been the least afraid of him."

"Oh, Arthur! you're strong," she murmured, and then recovered herself almost as quickly as she had given way. "I'm a fool," she said, with a sudden effect of briskness, drawing herself away from him, and putting her hands up to her hair. "However, you know now the sort of hysterical creature you'll have to put up with."

"I'm glad," he said, with a fond smile. "You were almost too wonderful before. I don't believe I should be afraid to kiss you now."

She blushed and turned away. "I suppose you know that it's ten minutes past eleven," she said, and added with a sudden return of agitation, "Oh! go—at once. And get it over." Then as though she doubted her own powers of resolution, she went quickly over to the door of her grandfather's room and opened it.

"Can you see Arthur now? He's here," she said coldly; and having received her reply she looked at Arthur and formally beckoned him to go in. But as he passed her in the doorway she momentarily clasped his arm with her two hands as if she were loath, even now, to let him go.

Yet, despite all this ominous introduction, it was pity and not fear that Arthur felt as he sat down by the old man, who had, so mysteriously it seemed, terrified his own family. He looked even less intimidating than usual this morning. He was obviously pleased by the news of the engagement, and his first words were almost roguish.

"Well, well, Arthur: I mustn't keep you long to-day," he said. "And I suppose, after this, that I shall have to reconcile myself to seeing rather less of Eleanor. However . . ." He completed his sentence with a gesture of his delicate, shrivelled hand.

Arthur knew the inference that he was expected to draw: in a few months—a year or two, at longest—all these little cares and troubles would have ceased for ever. And it crossed his mind that he might open his extraordinarily difficult announcement by some well-considered professional assurance that his patient might quite conceivably live another ten or fifteen years. He rejected that as being clumsy and tactless—although every form of approach seemed to him, just then, to be either clumsy or cruel. And it was in desperation, alarmed by the growing significance of his own silence, that he at last said,—

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid you'll miss her—rather—at first."

The old man appeared to be unaware that this sentence held any unusual suggestion. "Have you

had it in your mind that you might be married quite soon?" he asked.

"I think so, sir; yes, quite soon," Arthur replied, and then frowning and keeping his eyes averted from the old man's face—he went on quickly. "As soon as ever we can find somewhere to live, in fact. Flats and so on are fearfully difficult to get just now. And in Peckham, where I shall be practising . . ."

He paused and looked up. The old man had changed neither his position nor his expression. "But I know of no reason why you shouldn't be married while you are still here," he said, apparently missing all the implications of Arthur's speech.

"We—we thought of leaving here—at once," he replied, making an effort that even as he made it seemed gross and brutal. "In fact I meant—that is, I'm leaving to-day."

Mr Kenyon's keen blue eyes slowly concentrated their gaze with an effect of extraordinary attention on Arthur's face; and as they did so, their lids, which commonly drooped so that the iris was partly hidden, were lifted until the pupils, completely ringed by white, stared with the cold, intense watchfulness of a great bird.

"But that's impossible," he said very quietly.

And indeed it seemed to Arthur quite impossible at that moment to give any *reason* for his going at such foolishly short notice. Downstairs, or talking to Eleanor, the situation appeared so entirely different. Then, this quiet old man, with his deliberate movements, took the shape of a tyrant, cruel, and malignant. Here, in this room, he was a stately old gentleman, naturally affronted by what was almost an insult.

Arthur blushed vividly. "You see, sir," he blurted out, with the gaucheness of a peccant school-boy, "I feel rather—as if—if I were wasting my time here—in a way. I don't really want to be ungrateful, you know, although I suppose it must seem like it, but—I'd be awfully glad if you could see your way to letting me off."

"And your promise?" Mr Kenyon asked, still in the same cool, formal voice. "Does that count for nothing with you?"

"I'm sorry, sir. I feel that I can't stay," Arthur looked down again as he spoke. He found it difficult to meet the stare of those fierce hunting eyes.

"You realise, of course," Mr Kenyon continued, "that this will put an end to your engagement? I could not spare Eleanor."

"She—she wants to go too, sir," Arthur said.

"But she can't," Mr Kenyon replied, in the tone of a man who pronounces an unimpeachable judgment. "If you go, Arthur, you will go alone." Then, with a change of voice, he went on, "But you will alter your mind about this, I am sure. When you come to think it over, you will realise, I hope, how dishonourable it would be for you to leave me, after the bargain we made and the promise you gave me. In any case, take a week to think it all over. Take a month if you like."

Arthur sat in silence for what seemed to him a considerable time after the old man had finished speaking. He was thinking of the rest of the Kenyons downstairs. He had blamed them many times for their weakness, but he understood now how nearly impossible it must have been for them to have done anything but wait, postponing any decision from month to month. He himself, with all their experience behind him, was faltering; though

surely he could not be mistaken now in assuming that all this effect of persuasion was nothing more than a method. When he was bound—fairly caught in the meshes of the net—he would become as all the others had become, an object of indifference, subject now and again to subtle forms of intimidation, but never to any form of affection. In ten years, he would become like them, and Eleanor. . . .

"No," he said, with sudden determination, jumping to his feet and almost forgetting the person of the old man in front of him. "No! I'm going to-day, and Eleanor goes with me. You have no power to keep her, no sort of authority over her. We have made up our minds."

He had taken a couple of steps up the room as he spoke, and as he concluded he turned and faced his antagonist, prepared for an outburst, for some tremendous call upon those immense reserves of personality that had hitherto been hidden from him.

But Mr Kenyon was still sitting quietly in his chair, his hands resting on the arms, and the wide-open eyes that had recently gazed with such furious attention at Arthur were now fixed unseeingly upon the opposite wall. He was in one of his "trances," the dreaming god calm, powerful, detached, above all unapproachable, existing in his own world remote from all opposition and argument.

Arthur, tensely braced for an encounter, found himself surprisingly without a purchase. The influence of habit made him pause, he stood stock still, waiting tensely for the first signs of the old man's return to consciousness. But as the minutes passed his professional curiosity was aroused. He had never before had an opportunity to observe



one of these "trances" at close quarters, and he quietly approached the dreamer, looked keenly at him, and began to pass his hand slowly up and down before the staring eyes.

And then in a moment, in one amazing flash of enlightenment, the truth was made clear to him. These "trances" were nothing more than a pose, a deliberate well-practised piece of acting, brilliant enough to stand any test except this cool, professional observation. For it was clear enough to Arthur that the old man before him was making an effort to keep his gaze fixed on some object beyond the interference of that deliberate testing hand. And that the effort became increasingly difficult to maintain. The effect of rapt contemplation began to break. The old withered face suddenly puckered into an expression of fierce indignation, his hands first trembled, and then gripped the arms of his chair, and his eyes turned upon Arthur with a look of desperate malignity.

He was roused at last from his indifference. He was obviously shaking with rage. And, amazingly, he was impotent. The effect of calm power was stripped from him. He was nothing more than a pitiable old man in a furious, senile temper. He tried to speak and could only splutter. He grasped the stick that lay always ready to his hand, and had not the strength to strike more than the feeblest blow with it. Arthur did not even wince as that futile stroke fell upon his shoulders.

"G-get away—get away," the old man stutted. "Get out of my house. . . ." With a great effort he raised himself from his chair, his face working, his knees trembling. Again he lifted his stick and feebly struck with it at Arthur. Then his

knees gave way, and he crumpled pitifully, collapsing like a broken doll without making the least effort to save himself.

Arthur bent over him, lifted him, laid him out on his back, and rapidly unfastened his collar. . . .

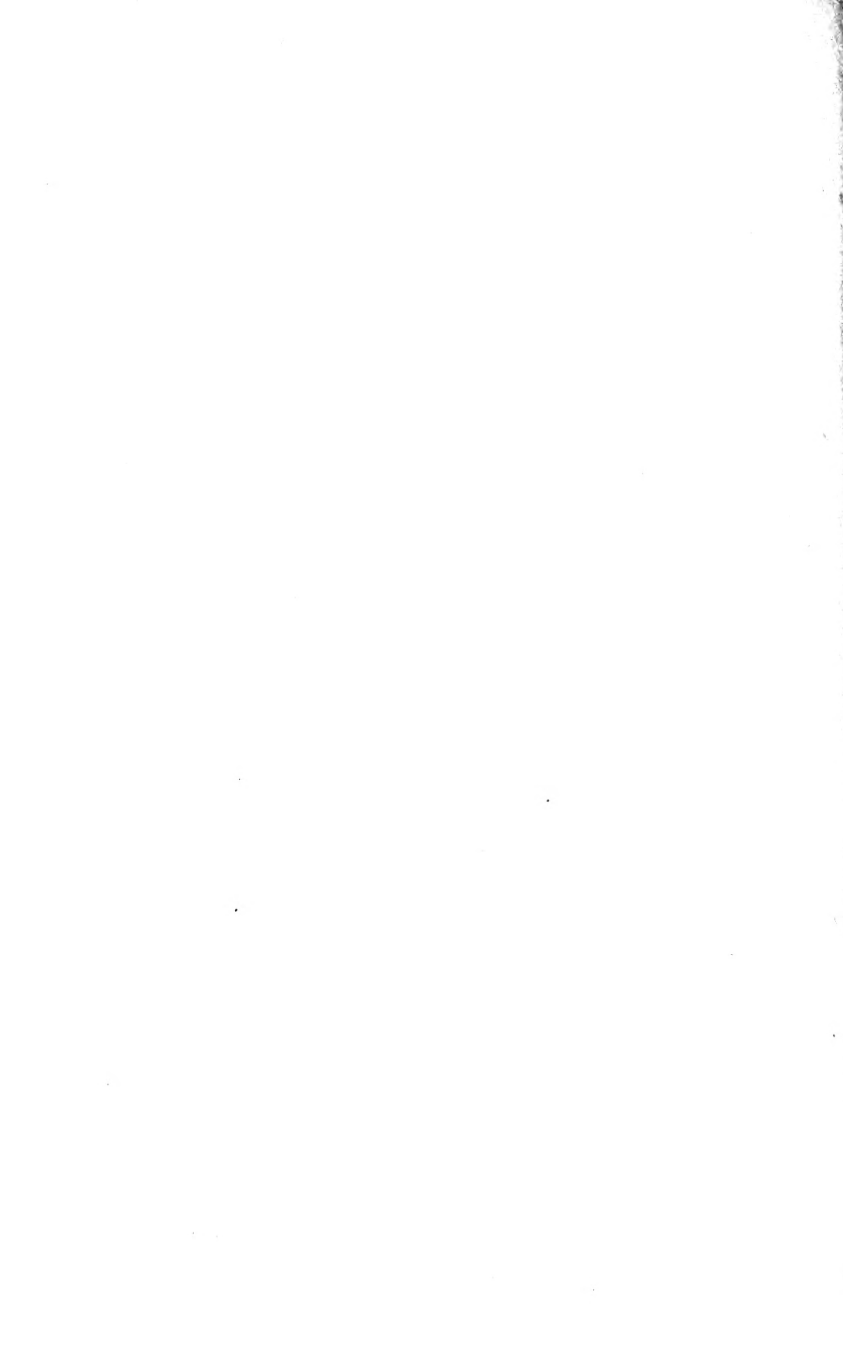
There was nothing to be done but get him to bed. He knew that perfectly well. But first he must have help. He jumped up and flung open the door into the ante-room.

"Eleanor," he said in a voice that he found difficult to control, "he has had a stroke. Send some one at once in the car for Fergusson. If he's not at the surgery they must go after him; find him somehow."

Clear and suddenly familiar in his mind, as if it were a tune that he had been trying to recall, was a sentence that he had spoken to Hubert a few days earlier:—

"It might break him down if he were badly crossed," he had said.





### XIII

THE gates were standing open. They may have been opened in expectation of the coming of the specialist who might arrive at any minute, but even the garden wore a new aspect that morning. It was as if the wide airs of Sussex were creeping in and subtly perverting the seemly splendour of that suburban super-garden.

Old Kenyon had been unconscious for twenty-four hours. Both Arthur and Fergusson knew with almost absolute certainty what was the matter with him. A cerebral artery had been ruptured and the area of damaged tissue appeared to be slowly extending. No remedy was possible. The chances were that within another twenty-four hours he would die without recovering consciousness. But he had trained nurses in constant attendance and a specialist had been sent for. Scurr had gone with Fergusson to fetch him in the big car.

Arthur had been up with the unconscious man all night, and had come out into the garden now for a breath of fresh air. When he came downstairs he had found himself a centre of burning interest. All the family, except the one he most wanted to be with, were drawn towards him as if he were the newly found vortex of a whirlpool. They tried desperately hard to be casual and decorous, but they found it impossible to keep their eyes off him. It seemed to Arthur that they almost gaped.

They were all extraordinarily wide-awake and feverishly inactive. The women's fancy-work had

not been taken out, nor the daily papers opened. The news they desired to learn that morning was not to be found in the *Times*. They drifted about the drawing-room and library, and held brief, useless conversations with one another. But when Arthur had passed through the suite a little after eleven o'clock looking for Eleanor, they had suddenly found a focus. He had seen the look of expectancy on their faces and had thrown them a crumb of news.

"He is still unconscious," he had said, and had understood that they asked more from him than that. Then, feeling that he could not endure the greediness of their attention, he had beckoned Joe Kenyon to come out with him into the garden.

They had come within sight of the open gates before either of them spoke.

"No hope, I suppose?" his uncle said then, as if released by the sight of the Sussex lane.

"I should say absolutely none," Arthur replied.

"Not likely to recover consciousness before the end?"

"Extremely unlikely," Arthur said. "In fact, scarcely possible, I think."

Joe Kenyon began to whistle softly between his teeth and abruptly checked himself. "If this property comes to me, I shall have that blasted wall taken down," he remarked, and continued, "You know, Arthur, I'm not going to play the hypocrite, especially to you. This isn't an occasion for mourning. It's as if we'd been living in the dark for half a lifetime and some one had taken the roof off and let the air and light in. I—I feel as if I can see the sky again for the first time in thirty years. It'd be loathsome, crawling hypocrisy to pretend that I'm the least sorry."

"Oh, obviously," Arthur agreed.

"But I say, how did it happen?" his uncle asked. "We haven't the shakiest notion you know—and . . ."

"I just murdered him," Arthur said quietly.

"Eh! What's that?" Joe Kenyon ejaculated.

"For all intents and purposes," Arthur explained. "I opposed him, and he tried to take cover—went into one of his 'trances.' Did you know they weren't trances, by the way?"

"No. What the devil were they, then?"

"Pretences, pieces of acting, fantasies of his own making. He used to hide himself in them, as it were. Dream what a great and powerful being he was, able to keep you all in attendance, keep you waiting for ten minutes in the middle of dinner if he liked, while he enjoyed the sense of holding you there. And when he was in danger of losing his temper with me, he tried to get under that cover, to shelter himself, rehabilitate his own pride."

"And you? What did you do?"

"Treated him as if he were a case in a clinic. Began to test his reactions. And—and—well, he couldn't keep it up."

"And then?"

"Couldn't control himself. Lost his temper—frightfully. Whacked at me with his stick—and collapsed. It was losing his temper did it—first time he has done it probably for forty years. Had you ever seen him lose his temper?"

Joe Kenyon considered that question for a moment or two before he said, "No! That was something he always had in reserve, something we were afraid of. He was always terrible to us, in a way, and we felt that if he went one step further he'd be—oh! devastating."

"He wasn't, you know," Arthur said. "He wasn't terrible, I mean. Not in the least. He was essentially a weak man and not even clever. I sat up with him all last night, and everything came to me as clearly as if I'd read it somewhere. He has altered, you see, in face and expression since he became unconscious. His chin seems to have retreated and all the lines round his mouth have changed. I couldn't keep the idea of a *rat* out of my mind when I looked at him. I got that effect somehow—something horribly intent and voracious but essentially weak. I remember looking at a dead rat in the stables when I was a boy. It was lying on its back with its feeble little front paws stuck up and the feet dangling. . . . And he had just the same expression on his face—ineffectual and yet cruel—as if his one regret was that he couldn't hurt any one again. I was almost sorry that he couldn't—especially as I had murdered him."

"Oh, nonsense, Arthur; nonsense," his uncle interposed. "Don't say that."

"True, though, in a way, isn't it?" Arthur said. "Truer than you guess, because I had known that it might kill him if he had a great shock. I'd even said so to Hubert, a few days ago—Sunday, I think it was. But I'd forgotten it. When I was telling him that I meant to go and take Eleanor with me whatever he did, I never once considered that it might be too much for him. And that was criminal carelessness in a medical man. I've been thinking about it more or less ever since."

He paused and looked ahead of him, out through the gate into the Sussex lane, and it was manifest that he was confessing to himself rather than to Joe Kenyon as he continued: "Not that I propose to take any responsibility for his death. That



wouldn't help any one. It happened so, and I shan't forget it, but that's all. Fergusson knows. There's no need to worry about it. Only—I've grown up. I'm not quite the same man I was twenty-four hours ago. I came down here to get back some of the years of youth that I'd lost in the war. Well, they're gone for good and all. I shall never be able to recover them now."

"Oh, nonsense!" his uncle repeated, taking his arm. "You've got a thundering good time ahead of you."

Arthur smiled. "I've got the best time any man could have ahead of me," he said, "but I shall enjoy it as a man, not as a boy. I didn't say that I regretted the passing of my youth, uncle."

"No, no, of course not," Joe Kenyon agreed. "And look here, old boy, we've been talking about you since yesterday morning, about you and Eleanor, that is; and Turner and I—and Hubert, of course—are quite agreed that if the old man has, after all, overlooked you in his will, that we shall take it for granted that it was just an oversight—though probably Eleanor will be left pretty well off. If he had a favourite, it was Eleanor."

"Good of you, uncle," Arthur replied warmly. "Awfully good and generous of you, but you must see that I couldn't take a farthing, even if the old man left it to me."

"I don't see why not," Joe Kenyon began, but Arthur stopped him by saying.

"No! Absolutely! In no circumstances whatever! It isn't simply that I could not bear to profit now by his death—though that counts. But—well—perhaps it needn't apply to you and the rest of them—but last night, while I was watching that poor thing on the bed, I realised so profoundly that

his one source of power had been his money. I assure you that he was a weak man and not clever. If you can't believe me, go upstairs and look at him. And without his money he would have had no authority, no power over you of any sort. It was just his money that gave him the chance to spoil all your lives. Oh, Lord! I'm talking like a father to you. Honestly, uncle, I feel nearly old enough for that, this morning. Want of sleep, perhaps. It does clear the head in a queer way sometimes."

"Hm! I dare say you're right, Arthur, about the money," Joe Kenyon mumbled. "I—I hope we shall make a better use of it. I don't think any of us has got the old man's cruelty—he was damned cruel, that's true enough."

"Not even Miss Kenyon?" Arthur put in.

"Esther? Oh, well! I don't know. Perhaps a little. But she has suffered like all the rest of us, and learnt her lesson."

There was no time to reply to that; for while Joe Kenyon was still speaking, the car turned in at the front gates, and they both hurried forward to meet it. When it stopped at their signal to Scurr, the specialist was introduced, and then both Arthur and his uncle got into the car, and they all went on together up to the house.

The conference in the old man's bedroom was a very short one, and the specialist had nothing to add to what they already knew, save the prestige of his authority. He was a tired, gray-looking little man of fifty or so, with an absent-minded manner, but when his anticipated acceptance of the diagnosis had been given, he looked keenly at Fergusson and said,—

"Made a lot of money, didn't he? All by his own efforts."

"It's more than half a million I've been told," Fergusson answered.

The specialist faintly shrugged his shoulders. "Wouldn't think it to look at him now. What?" he commented, and with the indifference of his profession he carelessly pinched the retreating chin of the little lax figure in the great bed.

"The predatory type, I presume," he added thoughtfully.

"Ay; he was that," Fergusson agreed. "More cunning than clever, though he had eyes that made you think of the eyes of a kite when he was roused. But he has altered greatly since this seizure. Maybe you'd hardly credit it now, but he has been a rare autocrat with his family."

"You see," Arthur put in, "he had them so absolutely in his power. He could leave his money as he liked, and they were all dependent upon him."

"And yet he must have had a certain generosity," Fergusson added, "for he kept the whole lot of them."

The specialist looked shrewdly at Arthur and slightly pursed his mouth. "That was his one interest and amusement, perhaps," he said. "The love of power of a naturally weak man. It's common enough if you care to look for it. Who succeeds?"

"We don't know yet," Arthur replied. "His lawyer is coming down by train this afternoon, and will stay here until the end—in case of a possible return to consciousness. But I suppose he'll tell us nothing until the old man's dead."

"You interested?" the specialist asked.

"No," Arthur said. "Not even to the extent of a five-pound note."

"You know that much, then?"

"I know that for certain," Arthur affirmed.

Fergusson whistled softly under his breath, but made no other comment.

They were quite a large party at dinner that night. Ken Turner had been telephoned for, and had come down by the same train as Mr Fleet, the solicitor. Joe Kenyon had taken his father's place at the head of the table, but occupied it as deputy only, for his sister and not his wife faced him from the other end.

They had nearly finished, when one of the trained nurses entered the room and made a sign across the table to Arthur. He jumped up at once and followed her. He knew even before she spoke to him just outside the dining-room door why she had fetched him.

There was nothing more to be done, but he sat for a few minutes beside the dead, remembering that he had promised some kind of autopsy to insure the body against premature burial. He would keep that promise, although he knew that the precaution was quite unnecessary. Also he thought again of the dead rat in the stable at home. The likeness was more pronounced than ever.

He found them all collected in the drawing-room when he returned to make his expected announcement.

"Yes! It's all over. He is dead," he said gravely, in answer to the look of inquiry they thrust at him.

And with that statement his function in the household ceased. They had eyes for him no longer. The centre of interest had shifted from the doctor to the lawyer. . . .

His head drooped, he was very tired, and he

went over and sat down by Eleanor. They had made no new plans, but he did not want to discuss their future just then. He wanted nothing but to be near her, to rest in his confidence of her love for him. She alone could give him peace and quietness, and he felt worn out.

They sat close together in silence, happy in each other's company, and attentive to nothing that was going on around them until their interest was aroused by the voice of Mr Fleet, speaking in a raised tone that was evidently meant to carry. He was a tall, spare man, almost completely bald, with a long thin nose and an expression of careworn good nature. He looked, Arthur thought, rather like a benevolent old stork, and he kept clearing his throat as he spoke with a queer little croak that was curiously birdlike.

It seemed that he was painfully aware at this moment of the importance of what he had to say and that the knowledge embarrassed him. Whether by accident or design, a certain grouping had been effected that gave him the centre of the stage. He was standing with his back to the great carved stone mantelpiece that was one of the features of the Hartling drawing-room, with a clear space between him and the eight people who in their characteristic ways were exhibiting the various indications of the intense excitement that was stirring them. After all those years of waiting and uncertainty they were about to learn the truth, at last. They had awakened from their long nightmare of impalpable, inopprobable resistances to the grateful sanity of everyday life. And they hoped. They had good cause for hope. After all, it could not be so bad for them now. The old man had never had any

spite against them. He had been generous in his own quiet way. He would have done the right thing by them.

Only Miss Kenyon, Arthur thought, looked doubtful and uneasy. She sat a little apart from the others and something of her habitual resolution and confidence had gone from her. For the first time since he had known her, Arthur saw her truly as her father's daughter. She too, perhaps, suffered from some intrinsic weakness of character, a weakness that had been hidden by the commanding office she had held in the household. . . .

"No need in this case," the embarrassed lawyer was saying, "to await any formal occasion. I have, as a matter of fact, the will in my bag upstairs. But it is so unusually simple and—and I might almost say drastic, that no direct reference to it is necessary."

Arthur and Eleanor looked at each other with a little start of surprise. They had never before doubted the legend of that untidy will.

"Er—er—er—in short," Mr Fleet continued, wiping his forehead, "the will could, in this case, certainly have been written on a half-sheet of note-paper. Er—er—it was made in '84, thirty-six years ago, soon after Mrs Kenyon's death. And—er—er—" his hesitation and distress became positively painful—"er—in short—he—he left everything absolutely to Miss Kenyon—to Miss Esther Kenyon—at her absolute disposal—er—there were no legacies of any other kind, and Miss Kenyon is the sole executrix."

Eleanor's hand had crept into Arthur's and at this announcement clasped his with such a sudden grip of anguish that he almost cried out. Then his heart seemed to miss a beat as realisation burst on

him, and his eyes turned as the eyes of every other person in the room inevitably turned, to stare at Miss Kenyon.

She was sitting very upright in her chair, gazing out before her with a look of rapt contemplation. Her right hand was lightly clenched as if she grasped a sceptre, and her widely opened eyes had the cruel, predatory stare of a hawk.

And clear and bright, a text from the Old Testament leapt into Arthur's mind. How did it go? "Whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

Eleanor had suddenly leaned upon him and the grasp of her hand was relaxed.







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